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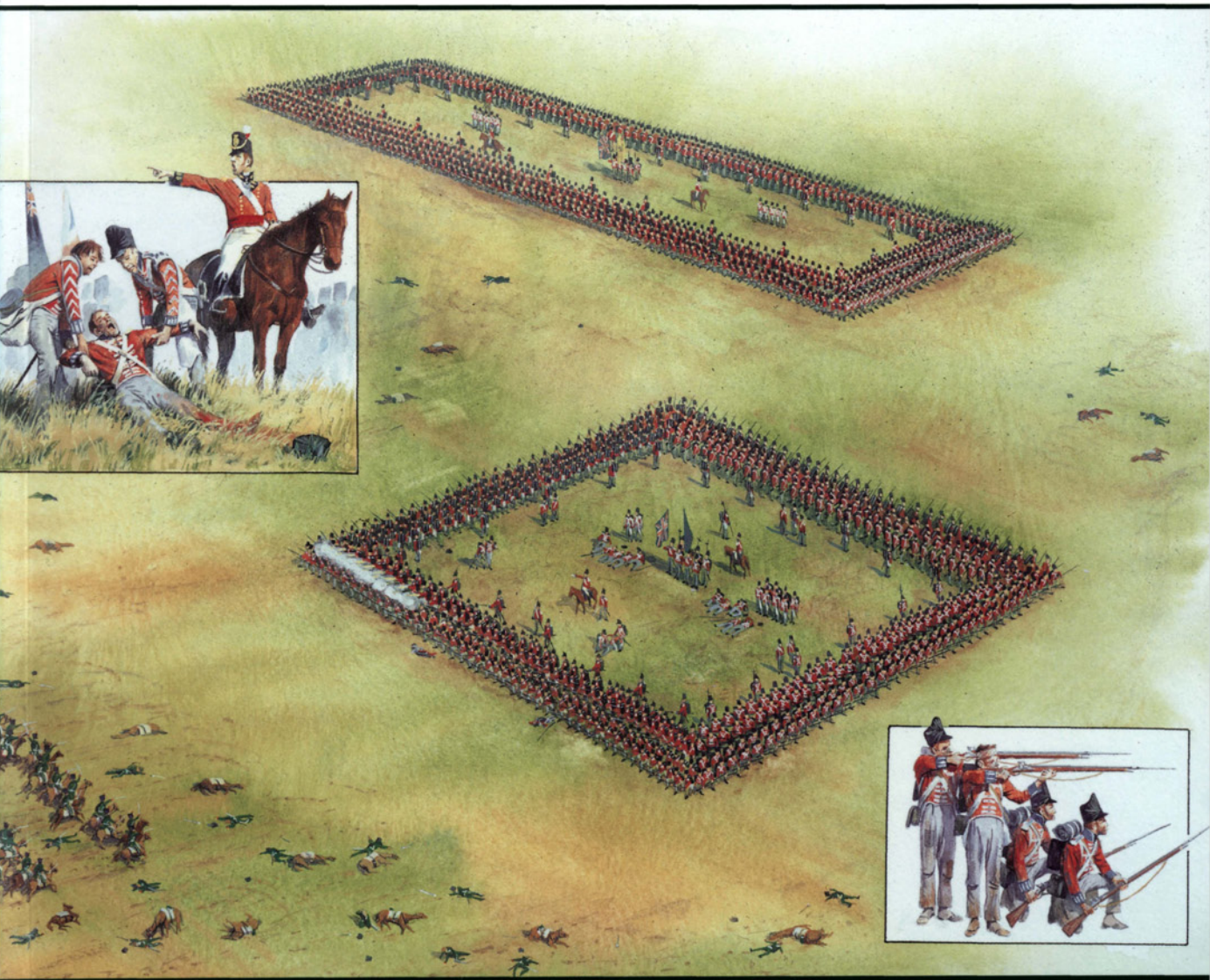
British Napoleonic Infantry Tactics 1792–1815



Philip Haythornthwaite • Illustrated by Steve Noon

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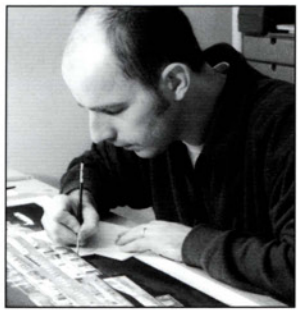

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Because this text includes a great deal of material quoted from a wide range of historical sources not specifically listed in the bibliography, the author has provided a list of numbered source references; these will be found at the end of the text on page 63.

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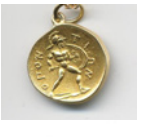


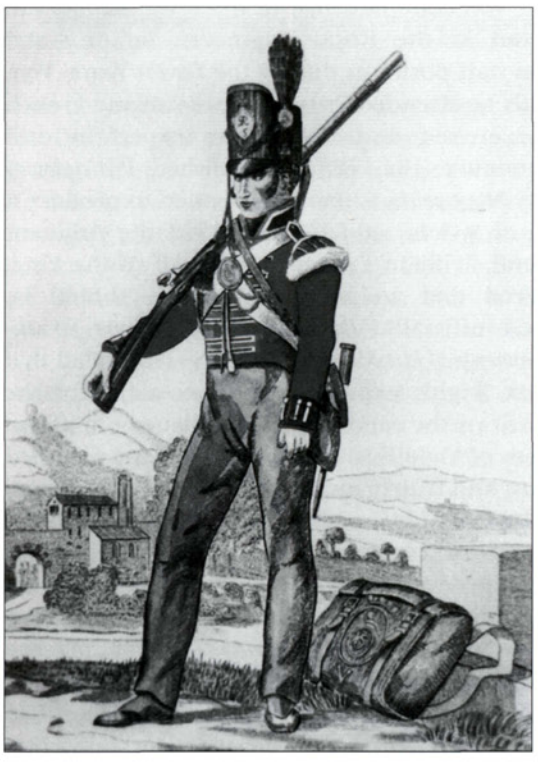
BRITISH NAPOLEONIC INFANTRY TACTICS 1792–1815

INTRODUCTION: 'THAT ARTICLE'

The Duke of Wellington's comment upon the British infantry, made just before the opening of the Waterloo campaign, is well known: asked about the outcome of the approaching hostilities, he pointed to an off-duty infantryman and said, 'There – it all depends upon that article whether we do the business or not. Give me enough of it, and I am sure'.[1] His trust was not misplaced: writing to Lord Beresford a fortnight later, he remarked of Waterloo that 'Never did I see such a pounding match. Both were what the boxers call gluttons … I had the infantry for some time in squares, and we had the French cavalry walking about us as if they had been our own. I never saw the British infantry behave so well.'[2] Considering that the infantry had formed the backbone of his victorious army in the Peninsular War, that was high praise indeed.

The reasons given at the time and later for the excellence of the infantry included such factors as the obduracy and determination of the individual soldier, discipline, leadership, and the regimental system. A commentator who interviewed officers from almost every regiment present at Waterloo recorded that many had expected to be beaten; but when he asked if they expected their own regiment to give way the answer was always 'Oh no, certainly not my own corps, but I thought some other would.' He wrote that 'Such was the universal answer; and this is the true English feeling: this indignancy of being even supposed to be likely to be the first to give way before an enemy is the true harbinger of success… Our regiments, accustomed to act and live alone, are not taught to dread the failures of adjoining corps… The English regiment will not give way, because the English regiment of the same brigade has done so, but will mock the fugitive, and in all liklihood redouble its own exertions to restore the fight – a true bull-dog courage against all odds – if well led.'[3]

This last qualification acknowledged that the infantry did indeed falter at times – though Wellington remarked that he was never overly concerned about troops running away, provided that they came back; but the attribution of steadfastness entirely to regimental spirit leaves out of the equation another and most important contributory factor in producing this efficiency – the system of tactics.

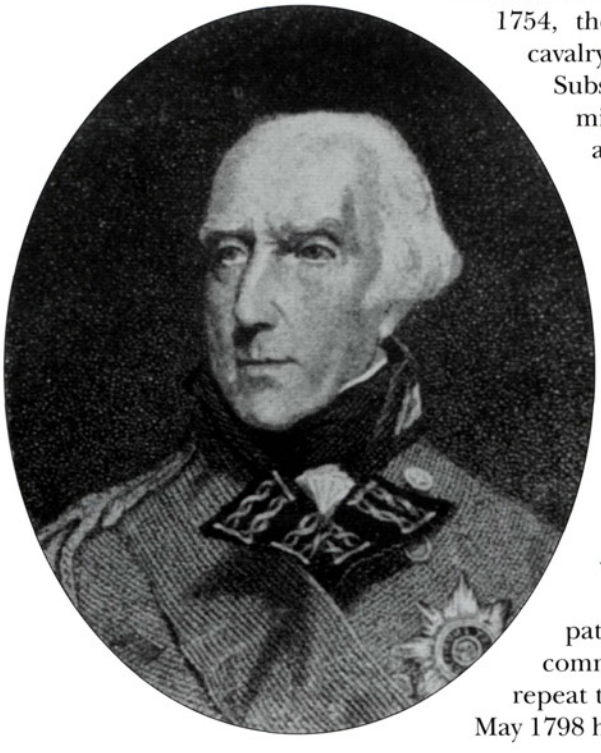


'That article...': the foundation of infantry tactics was the ordinary infantryman – here a private of the light company of the 5th (Northumberland) Regiment of Foot, 1815. (Print by Genty)

THE MANUALS

In the period preceding the commencement of the French Revolutionary Wars the British infantry had no unified system of drill, so that 'every commanding officer manoeuvred his regiment after his own fashion; and if a brigade of troops were brought together, it was very doubtful whether they could execute any one combined movement, and almost certain that they could not execute the various parts of it on the same principle... It is only surprising that ... the British army was able to execute any combined movements at all.'[4] Even the speed and method of marching varied, so, as was stated at the time, there might be little difference between one regiment's quick march and another's slow. Drill and manoeuvre manuals did exist – for example, *Manoeuvres, or the Whole Evolutions of a Battalion of Foot* (London, 1779), or John Williamson's *Elements of Military Arrangement, and the Discipline of War, adapted to the Practice of the British Infantry* (3rd edition, 1791); but even in the early 1790s George Townshend's *A Plan of Discipline Composed for the Use of the Militia of the County of Norfolk* was still being recommended, more than 30 years after its publication in 1759. One commentator remarked that no matter how talented a general, without a common system it was impossible 'to attempt the most simple manoeuvres before an enemy, much less such complicated ones as the circumstances of the situation may point out and require'. This author was the individual who did most to remedy the problem: David Dundas.

The architect of infantry tactics: Gen Sir David Dundas Bt (1735–1820), known as 'Old Pivot' from his system of manoeuvre. He held various commands, including the post of commander-in-chief (1809–11), but it was his tactical system that was his great contribution to the British military establishment. (Print after R.Owen)



Dundas' *Principles of Military Movement*

The son of a prosperous Edinburgh merchant, Dundas was born in 1735 and entered the military academy at Woolwich in 1750; he trained and worked as a surveyor, was commissioned in the Royal Artillery in 1754, then served in the Royal Engineers, infantry and cavalry, and in staff positions during the Seven Years' War. Subsequently he attended Prussian, Austrian and French military exercises, and became an expert in drill and manoeuvre. In 1788 he published *Principles of Military Movements*, a manual intended to produce a practical system; and in June 1792 the Adjutant General, William Fawcett, on behalf of the king, ordered that an amended version should be issued officially, *Rules and Regulations for the Movements of His Majesty's Infantry*. This stated that it was 'highly expedient and necessary, for the benefit of the service at large, that one uniform system of Field-Exercise and Movement, founded on just and true principles, should be established, and invariably practised, throughout His [Majesty's] whole Army [and] strictly adhered to, without any deviation whatsoever therefrom.'

The adoption of Dundas' system must have been patchy, however, for when the Duke of York became commander-in-chief in 1795 he found it necessary to repeat the 1792 order that made the manual mandatory; in May 1798 he went further, stating that 'every Officer of Infantry

The Eighteen Manoeuvres

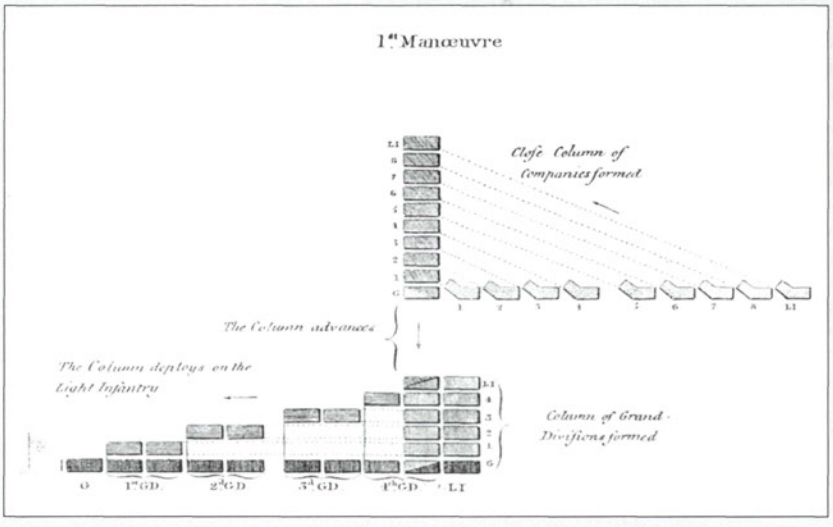
The Eighteen Manoeuvres in Dundas' manual formed a sequence to be performed during a review, involving the drills described in detail elsewhere in the manual. They were intended to encompass much of what would be required on the battlefield, and though often mentioned in later works they are rarely described. They were:

1 From line, form close column of companies upon the grenadiers; form close column by grand divisions (i.e. with two-company frontage); deploy again into line upon the light company.
2 Form close column of companies in front of light infantry; form close column with two-company frontage; deploy into line.
3 Form close column of companies upon one of the centre companies, facing to rear; countermarch, and deploy into line upon a centre company.
4 Change of position in open column: line wheels to take up oblique position.
5 'Wing thrown back': line wheels to take up a position parallel to its original position.
6 Line wheels into open column; forms close column; opens; forms solid square; takes on position of 'Prepare to receive cavalry', two front ranks kneeling; rear ranks commence file-firing; cease; kneeling ranks fire volley.
7 'Countermarch by files': right-wing company becomes left and vice-versa, and so along the line.
8 'March in open column': battalion wheels into line.
9 'Echellon [sic] change of position': open column wheels to take up a position at an oblique angle to the original.
10 Change of position: line wheels using light company as a pivot.
11 Change of position: line forms open column, advances, re-forms line.
12 Retreat in line: battalion retires 50 paces covered by light company in skirmish order; halts, fires twice by companies from centre to flanks; retires 250 paces by alternate companies in stages of 50 paces; forms line, retires 50 paces, halts, fronts. Light company divides into two wings during this process, assembles at rear and then resumes its place on left wing.
13 'March to a flank in Echellon': companies wheel to right, advance in echelon, re-form line, fire three times by companies, from flanks to centre.
14 Form hollow square; square advances with one corner leading, then with one face leading; fire by companies; re-form line from square.
15 Line retires 100 paces, covered by light company; then retires by files, halts in open column, wheels back into line; light company retires through it and re-assembles 30 paces to the rear.
16 'Firing, advancing, and charging to the front': battalion advances 50 paces in line; files to the front, covered by light company, 50 paces, halts in open column, wheels into line; advances in line 50 paces, then fires four times by alternate half-battalions; light company retires and re-forms in rear, half on each wing; advance in line 50 paces, fire volley, advance 20 paces and fire volley, then charge 50 paces; halt and load while light company moves forward to cover the battalion, pursues enemy and then returns to assemble on left flank.
17 Retire in line 100 paces; retire by alternate half-battalions, firing four times; retire 100 paces and halt. [*Note:* Dickinson's guide states that the light company should cover the retreat.]
18 Line advances 100 paces; fires twice; advances obliquely to right and left; advances 100 paces, fires twice.

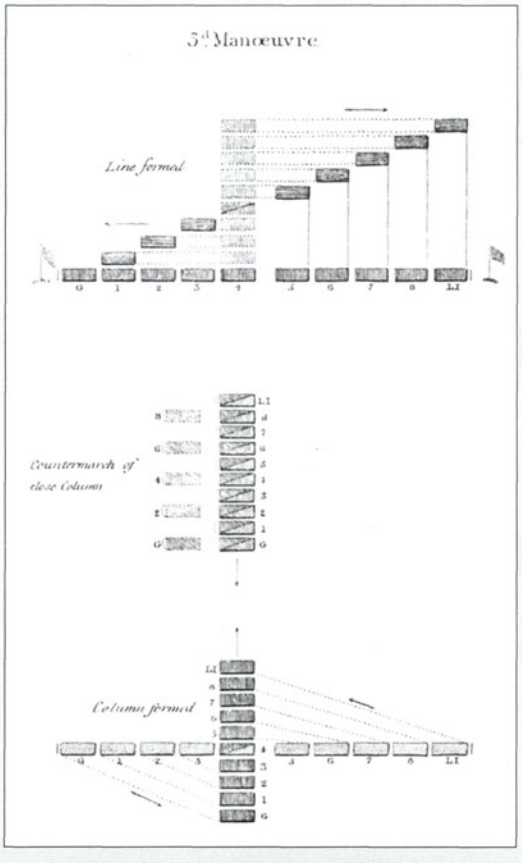
Exercise ends, battalion ports arms, and general salute is given (to the presiding general or inspector: officers salute and band plays 'God Save the King').

shall be provided with a copy of these Regulations'. (The duke's support for Dundas was stated subsequently to have been 'one of the most distinguished services which could be rendered to a national army'.[5])

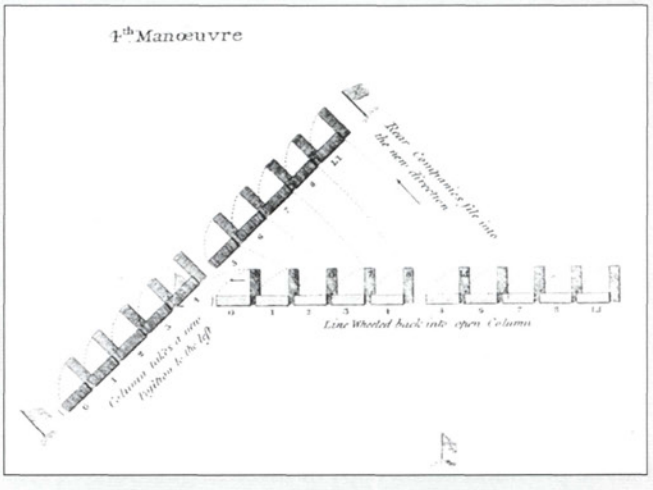
Dundas received some criticism, notably for concentrating the most necessary movements into a series of 'Eighteen Manoeuvres', and for the advocacy of a line three ranks deep. Despite the absence of a unified system, the British army in the American War of Independence had evolved practical tactics – including much of what would come to be regarded as light infantry service – and a two-deep line; but in Dundas' defence, it was remarked that some of the practical aspects of American service had fallen out of use in the 1780s, and that tactics suitable for North American conditions were not necessarily ideal for European warfare. Dundas was also criticized for copying Prussian practice – in 1784 the Prussian tactician Gen Friedrich Christoph von Saldern had published his memoradum *Taktik der Infanterie*, which was said to have had some influence on Dundas. However, Dundas stated that his theory was based upon personal, practical experience, and that his presence at the Prussian manoeuvres in 1785 only caused him to revise what he had already written. Sir John Moore remarked that Dundas' manual would have been even better but for 'those damned eighteen manoeuvres; "Why-ay", says Sir David, slowly, "ay, people don't understand what was meant. Blockheads don't understand"'.[6]



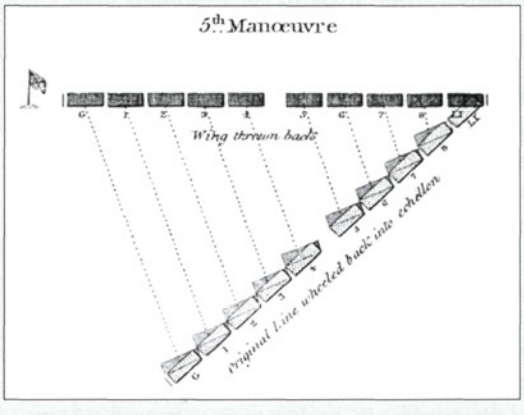
The first of the Eighteen Manoeuvres showed some of the most important movements required of the battalion: forming column from line; then forming 'grand divisions' each of two companies; then deploying back into line. The 2nd Manoeuvre was virtually a reversal of this.



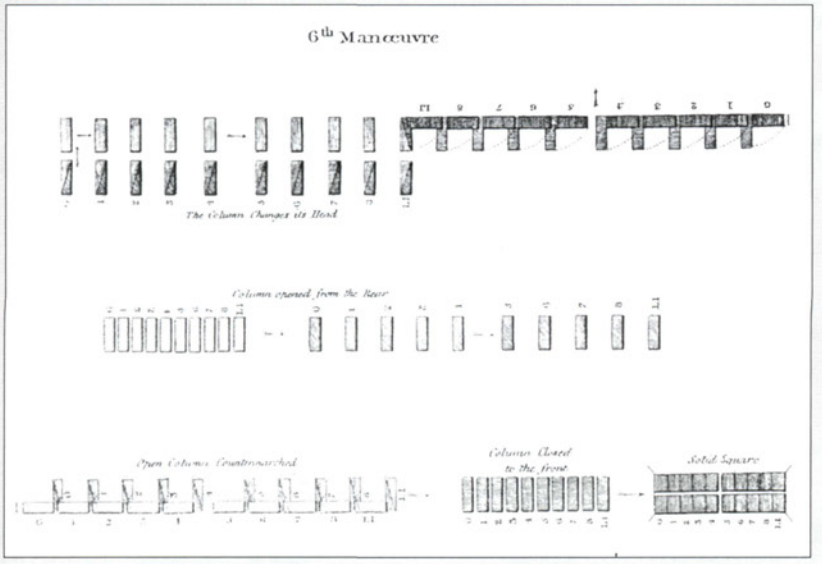
3rd Manoeuvre: a variation of the change of formation from line into column, this time forming on a centre company rather than a flank company.

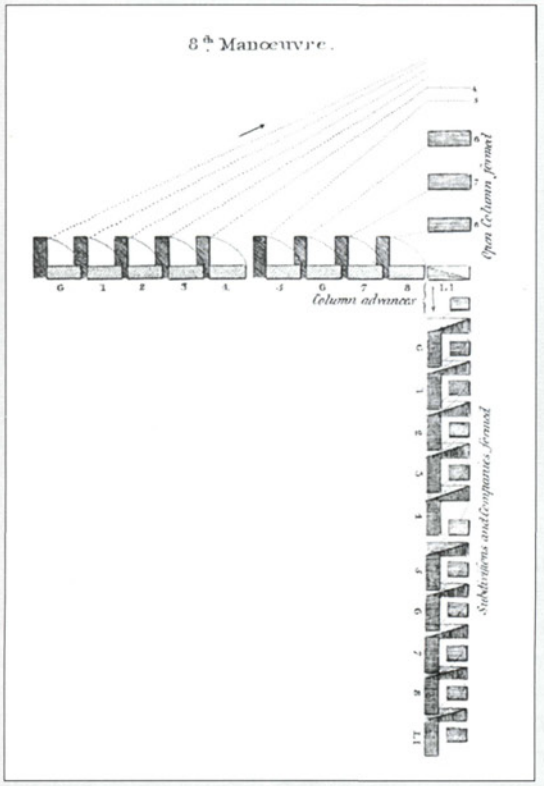

4th Manœuvre
Rear Companies file into the new direction
Column takes a new position to the left
Line Wheeled back into open Column

4th Manoeuvre: the line wheels back into an open column of companies; then moves to take up a new position at an oblique angle to that originally occupied.



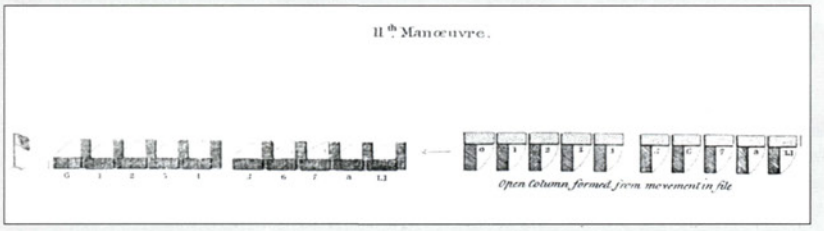
5th Manoeuvre: the line wheels with its left 'wing thrown back', and advances in echelon, to take up a position at an angle to the original.



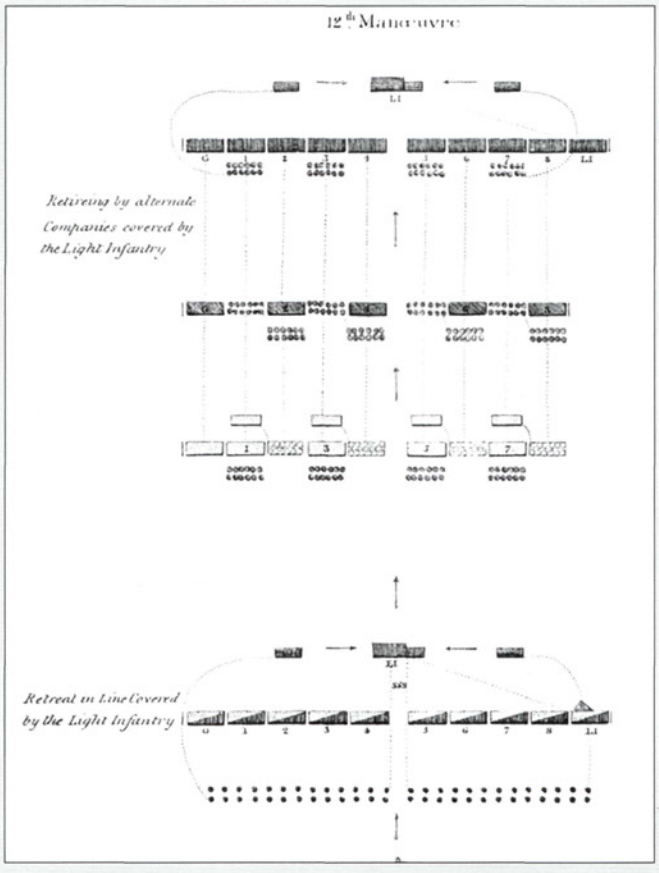


ABOVE **6th Manoeuvre (from top left to bottom right): the line moves into various column formations, culminating in 'solid square' ready to receive cavalry – one of the most important of all defensive manoeuvres.**

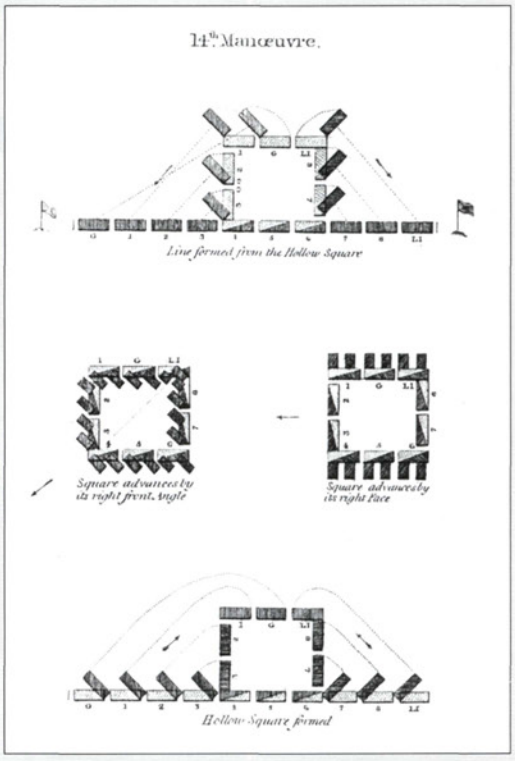
LEFT **8th Manoeuvre: forming from line into an open column; then into subdivisions, then companies.**



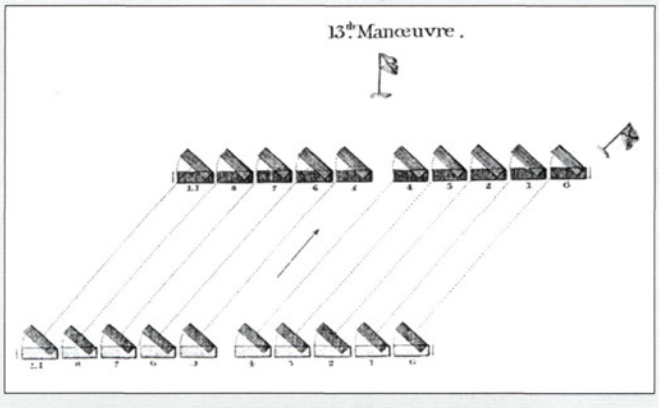
11th Manoeuvre: forming from line into open column.


12th Manœuvre
Retiring by alternate Companies covered by the Light Infantry
Retreat in Line Covered by the Light Infantry

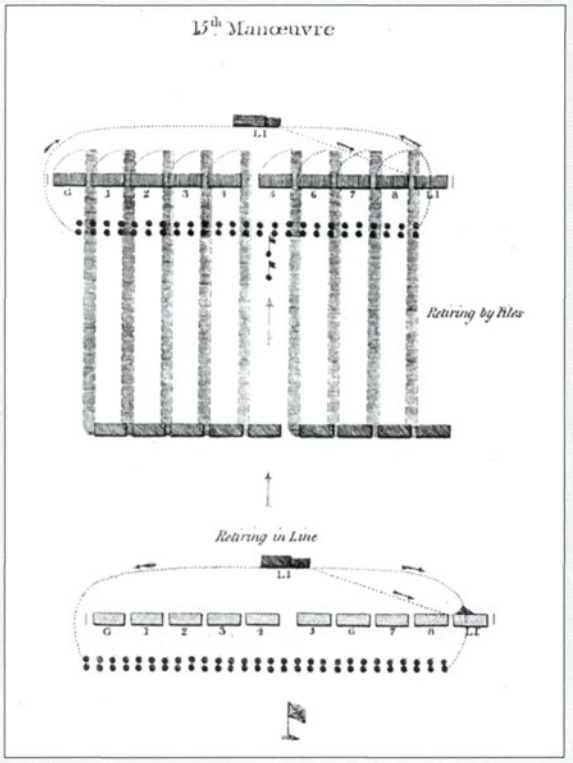
12th Manoeuvre: Retreating (upwards) in line by alternate companies, firing during the process. The other companies are covered by the light company, which divides into two wings before re-uniting behind the line, and then resuming its place on the left of the line.


14th Manœuvre.
Line formed from the Hollow Square
Square advances by its right front, angle
Square advances by its right face
Hollow Square formed

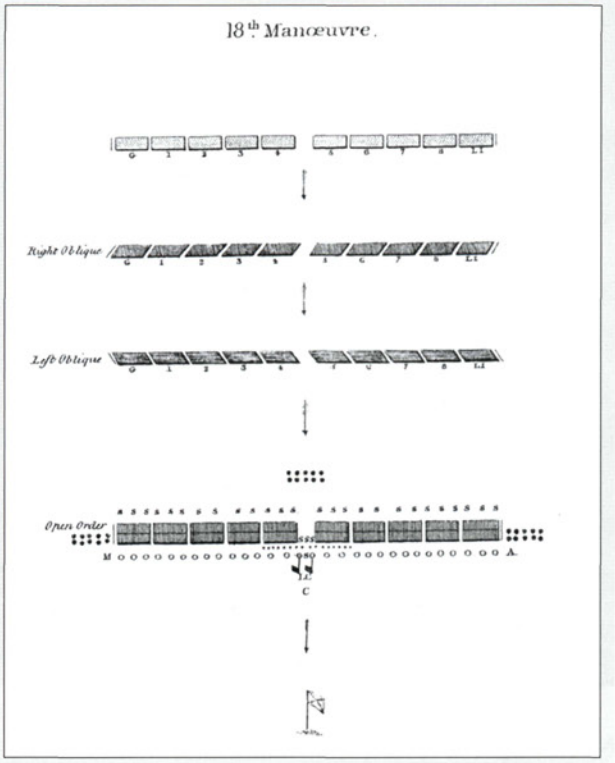
14th Manoeuvre – one of the most important for the battalion's security on the battlefield. (From bottom upwards): from line, formation of a hollow square; this may then advance (left) with one corner leading and the subdivisions in echelon, or (right) with one face leading, the 'sides' advancing in subdivisions; and then re-forming line from square. The grenadier company had the furthest to march when forming the square from line, since it closed the square's rear face.



13th Manoeuvre: the companies forming a line wheel to advance in echelon to the right, then re-form a line. This allowed a battalion to shift its position by means of a movement diagonal to its original position. The 10th Manoeuvre was rather similar, but involved the line wheeling backwards by echelon, pivoting on the fulcrum of the light company.

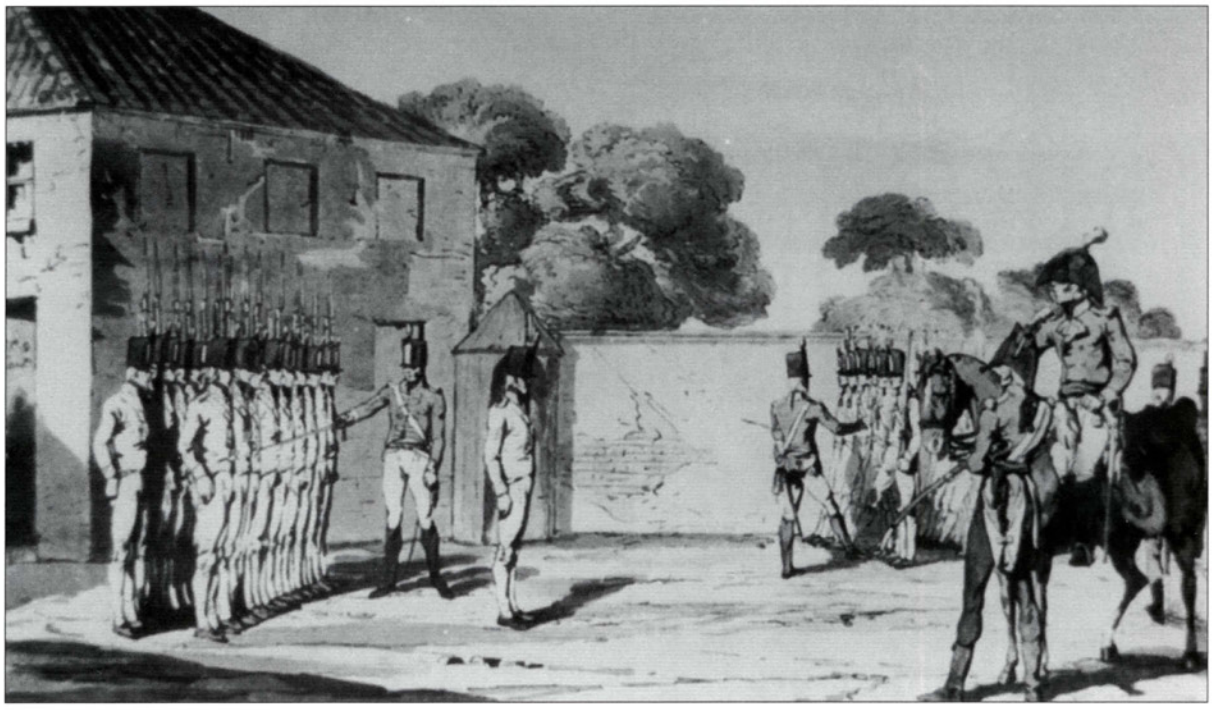


15th Manoeuvre (from bottom upwards): a battalion retires in line, covered by the light company; then retires by files; then re-forms line. This 'defiling' movement could be used to go through or bypass obstacles on the battlefield; or a company might form a column of subdivisions or sections for the same purpose – depending on the nature of the obstacle, such manoeuvres might involve one or several companies, while the others maintained their line if their front was unobstructed.



18th Manoeuvre (from top downwards): the battalion advances in line; then obliquely to right and left, firing meanwhile; then takes up line in open order.

In addition to the official manual in its various editions, a number of other publications appeared during the period, generally based upon Dundas but sometimes with additions. For example, Williamson's *Elements*, already mentioned, made reference to Dundas' work but covered a wider field, including the duties of each rank. The increase in the auxiliary forces at this time created a demand for abbreviated guides or elucidations of the official manual. For example, Capt Henry Dickinson of the 1st Royal East India Volunteers produced *Instructions for Forming a Regiment of Infantry for Parade of Exercise, together with the Eighteen Manoeuvres* … (London, 1798), which had remarkably clear diagrams. Some publications included additional features – *The Volunteer and Intelligent Soldier's Companion* (1803) covered not only the Eighteen Manoeuvres and the Manual Exercise, but also such details as the conduct of a military funeral. Others were more basic, such as *Rules and Regulations for the Drill* issued by LtCol Sir John Riddell to his 2nd Battalion Roxburghshire Volunteers in 1805, which concerned the Manual Exercise and firing (still, at this date, using the three-rank line, except for light infantry, in two ranks).



An often-reproduced print of infantry being drilled by red-jacketed sergeants; the men, wearing their white undress jackets, are at the 'shoulder arms' position. Note that they are in a two-deep line; the single figure out in front of them is the 'fugelman', a trained soldier from whom the others took their timing for drill movements. (Print after J.A. Atkinson)

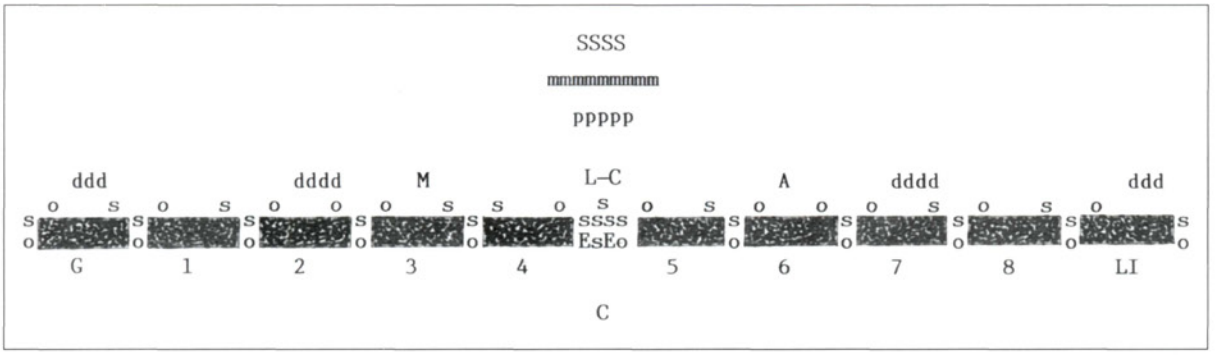
Despite its imperfections, Dundas' manual was of the highest significance. Although the 1824 regulations discarded a number of his methods, in 1833 they were revived, with modifications. A writer styling himself 'A Field Officer' was able to remark in 1845 that 'The system laid down by Sir David Dundas, after the lapse of half a century, still remains in use almost unchanged.'[7]

THE BATTALION

Organization

The primary foundations of the system of tactics were the organization of the infantry, and the weapon with which it was armed. The limitations of the musket are considered below; here we are concerned with the building-blocks of Dundas' system.

Although a regiment might possess two or more battalions, only in the rarest circumstances did two battalions of the same regiment serve together, so that the principal tactical formation was the battalion. Each comprised ten companies, named from their position when the battalion was drawn up in line: eight numbered 'centre' or 'battalion' companies, and two 'flank' companies – one of grenadiers (which stood on the right flank) and one of light infantry (which stood on the left). The battalion companies were numbered 1 to 8 from right to left, and the battalion could be divided into two 'wings' of five companies each, or into 'grand divisions' of two companies each. A common cause of confusion today is that the terms 'company' and 'platoon' – nowadays used for two distinct sizes of sub-unit, the latter a smaller part of the former – were then used of groups with the same number of men, for different purposes: the company was an administrative



A battalion in line, after Dundas' manual (the front, facing the enemy, is to the bottom). Companies are numbered 1–8; G = grenadier company, LI = light infantry company. C = colonel or commanding officer; L-C = lieutenant-colonel or second-in-command; M = major; A = adjutant; E = ensign with colour; o = officer; s = sergeant; d = drummer; p = pioneer; m = musician (band); and S = staff officer – i.e. non-combatant officers – the quartermaster, paymaster and surgeons.

Some contemporary manuals show fieldpieces on each flank, the light 'battalion guns' with which units were originally equipped. Crewed by men of the battalion and intended to provide close fire support, these proved more cumbersome than useful, and the practice had ceased by about 1800.

sub-unit, while a platoon referred to a tactical sub-unit of the firing line. Dundas explained:

> Each company is a platoon. Each company forms two sub-divisions, and also four sections. But ... it will happen, when the companies are weak, that they can only (for the purposes of march) form three sections, or even two sections... The eight battalion companies will compose four grand divisions, eight companies or platoons, sixteen sub-divisions, thirty-two sections, when sufficiently strong to be so divided, otherwise twenty-four... When the battalion is on a war establishment, each company will be divided into two platoons. When the ten companies are with the battalion, they may then, for the purposes of firing or deploying, be divided into five grand divisions from right to left.

(Perhaps it may be worth the space to clarify this passage, using notional numbers of men – say, a battalion of 1,000 men in ten equal companies of 100 each. A company forms two sub-divisions of 50, and four sections of 25. If the company is very understrength, then for the purposes of the marching column it may only be able to form up in three sections (75 men in all), or even only two sections (50 men). When manoeuvring on the battlefield the eight centre companies, with 800 men, can form four grand divisions each of 200 men; either eight 100-man or 16 50-man firing platoons; 16 sub-divisions, each of 50; or 32 sections, each of 25 men. When the flank companies – which were often detached – are serving in a single body with the centre companies, then the battalion can form five grand divisions each of two companies.)

Dundas stated that each company should normally comprise three officers, two sergeants, three corporals, one drummer and 30 privates, but for war establishment the numbers increased to a theoretical strength of about 100 per company, and thus about 1,000 per battalion. Even before the attrition of campaign, such numbers were attained only rarely; and while the Foot Guards always fielded stronger battalions than the average line regiment, regimental 2nd Battalions were generally weaker than 1st Battalions. At Bussaco, for example, excluding rifle companies, battalion strengths varied from 1,055 all ranks (40th Foot) to 368 (2/24th), with an average strength of 632. At Waterloo, only three battalions had 1,000 or more of all ranks, two of them Foot Guards; the strongest was the 52nd (1,167) and the weakest the 42nd (338, having suffered heavy losses at Quatre Bras two days before), with an average strength of 669.

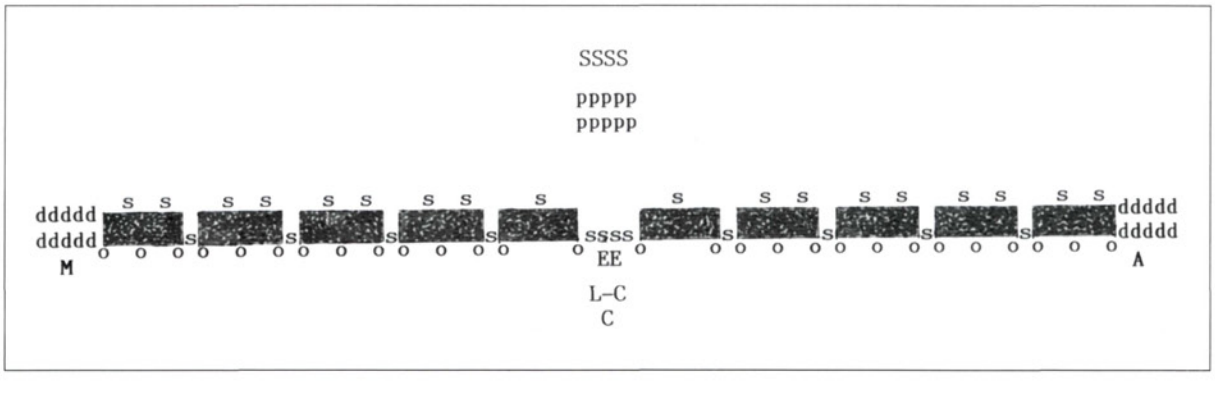
Dundas noted that 'The companies must be equalized in point of numbers, at all times when the battalion is formed for field movement,' which must have happened customarily to take account of recent casualties; for example, referring to Quatre Bras, James Anton of the 42nd recalled how the unit was 'resting in line, without having equalized the companies, for this would have been extremely dangerous in so exposed a position' – thus implying that under other circumstances equalization of company numbers would have occurred.[8]

MARCHING AND FORMATIONS

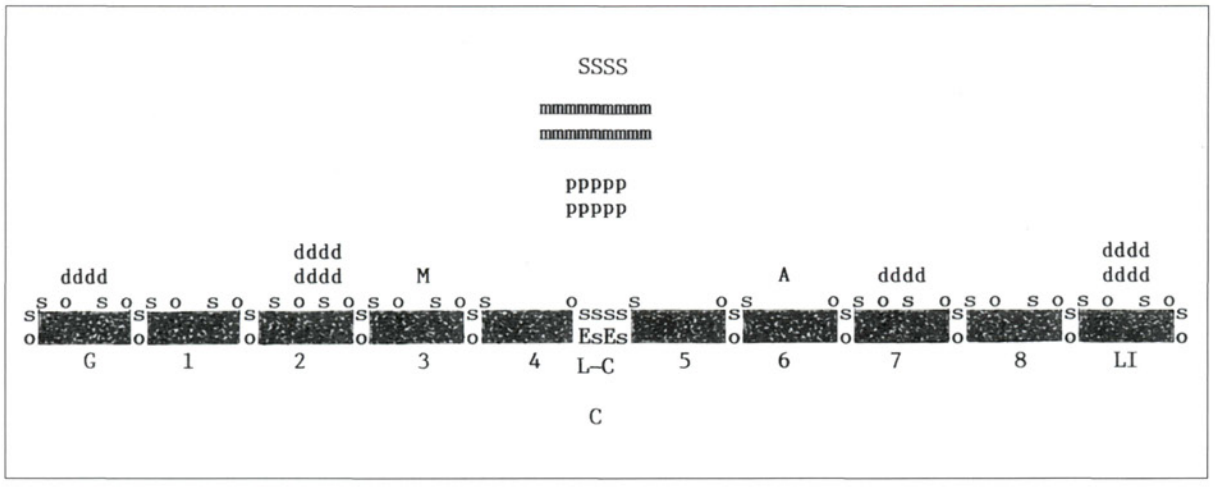
Dundas' manual began by describing the 'Position of the Soldier', standing smart and erect and banishing 'the air of the rustic'. Troops were drawn up in either close or open order, terms which in this context described the distance between ranks: the former was one pace from the heels of one man to the heels of the man behind him, the latter – used mainly for parade – two paces. Dundas stated that files should be 'lightly touching, but without crouding [*sic*]; each man will then occupy a space of about 22 inches' (56cm). This established the frontage of a company in line: for example, 100 men in three ranks would occupy about 20 yards (18.25m), 60 men in two ranks about 18 yards (16.75m), and thus a battalion of 600 men in two ranks about 180 yards (167.7m). The officer commanding each company stood on the extreme right of its front rank, his 'covering' sergeant immediately behind him in the second rank; the second officer and his sergeant on the left; and other officers and sergeants in a supernumerary rank, three paces behind the rear rank.

Dundas insisted that for simplicity, only three principal speeds of march be used, with a pace of 30in (76.2cm) from heel to heel – speeds which were slightly reduced from those he had suggested originally: 'ordinary time' of 75 paces to the minute; quick march, 108; and the quickest or 'wheeling step', 120 paces. The latter was used for wheeling, changing formation or 'doubling' – this did not mean moving 'at the double' in the modern sense, but the forming of every two ranks or files into one.

Variations were used in certain circumstances. 'Stepping out' could be used for a 'temporary exertion', in which the pace was increased to 33in (83.8cm); and for a 'momentary retardment' recourse could be had



A battalion in open order, according to Dickinson's manual of 1798. Note the drummers on the flanks in this instance; also the officers all in front of their companies, and the third or 'supernumerary' ranks composed of sergeants alone. The total of 30 gives three sergeants per company.



A battalion in close order – an alternative to Dundas' version (see Plate B); here 34 sergeants are shown. Dundas lists only one drummer for each company on normal establishment, making a maximum of nine if we discount the light company. Clearly more were added when a battalion was brought up to war strength; Dundas' diagram shows 12, and this version as many as 16. Dickinson's manual stated that 'some trifling deviations' from the official manual were permitted in some regiments, but that his manual was 'generally in conformity with the practice of the Coldstream Regiment of Guards'.

to 'stepping short', in which the soldier 'will step as far as the ball of his toe, and no farther'. When an advancing unit was required to wait until others came up, 'mark time' could be used, in which the cadence of the step was maintained but no advance made, by 'alternately throwing out the foot, and bringing it back square'. 'Back step' in ordinary time was used to move a few paces to the rear. The 'side or closing step' to right or left involved moving one foot 12in (30.5cm) to the side, then moving the other foot until the heels touched; it was used to move a short distance towards a flank and to alter the distance between sub-units. The 'oblique step' permitted a unit to move diagonally: one foot was moved 19in (48.3cm) in a diagonal line forwards, then the other foot was moved 13in (33cm) directly before the first foot, so that the unit moved at an angle of about 25 degrees while the soldier remained facing squarely to the front. This ensured that the line remained steady, which might not have been the case had each man inclined to right or left and marched forwards.

Movement in column

Movement was based upon two formations, column and line, the former generally consisting of a battalion's companies arrayed one behind another. The distance between companies was related to the frontage of a company in line. In an 'open column' the distance between companies equalled the frontage, so that 'An open column occupies the same extent of ground as when in line, minus the front of its leading division'; thus the companies had enough of an interval between them to simply wheel right or left, like swinging gates, in order to form a line at right-angles to the original direction of march. With a company frontage of approximately 20 yards (18.25m), the distance between companies would be 20 yards; in 'half distance' column, 10 yards (9m), and at 'quarter distance', 5 yards (4.5m).

When in 'close column' the companies were only one pace apart. Dundas implies that half- or quarter-distance column was the preferred formation, and that close column was formed to pass a defile or bridge, to make an attack 'in certain confused situations', or to oppose cavalry – since it was virtually a solid square, in which the men could simply turn outwards to face the enemy. He stated that when halted, prior to

A battalion advancing, with the colours in the centre of the leading formation, perhaps suggesting a frontage of a grand division (two companies). Note the NCOs in the third or supernumerary rank, endeavouring to keep the formation steady. (Print by Bowyer)

deploying into line, a close column would have a frontage of two companies and a depth of five (see Plates A and B). Usually the battalion's colours 'are 3 paces behind the fourth battalion company, covered by their serjeants', but when the battalion was in close column both the colours and the officers and sergeants from the supernumerary rank marched at the flank.

For a 'column of route' or of march, the frontage was based on the sub-divisions of each company, 'never on a less front than 6 files where the formation is 3 deep, or 4 files where it is 2 deep'. This formation could quickly form column of manoeuvre or line, and it was stated that at no time should a column of route exceed in length a distance greater than its frontage when deployed in line. Marching in a column of sub-divisions, the company commanding officer marched with the leading sub-division, his sergeant with the second; in column of sections he led the first, his sergeant the middle section, and another officer or sergeant the third. Woods, enclosures or narrow tracks might require 'march in file', formed from right, left or centre of a line, when it was usual for muskets to be trailed.

The pace of a column of route was about 75 steps per minute or 2½ miles (4km) per hour; the soldier was permitted to relax, not marching in step nor with carried arms, and files were loosened. Officers and sergeants retained their positions, but officers who possessed horses were allowed to ride at the flank. Dundas emphasized that the pace of a column should be steady, to avoid troops at the rear having to halt or to hurry to keep up.

The line – three ranks or two?

Manoeuvre in column, including on the battlefield, was essential for cohesion and regularity of pace, but for combat the line was the preferred formation, if only because it permitted all muskets to be used simultaneously. Dundas insisted that a line should be three ranks deep, because a line of two ranks 'would never be brought to make or to stand an attack with bayonets, nor could it have any prospect of resisting the charge of a determined cavalry. In no service is the fire and consistency of the third rank given up; it serves to fill up the vacancies made in the others in action, without it the battalion would soon be in a single rank.' (He did authorize a two-deep line for a weak company in training, to maintain a reasonable frontage or when an extended frontage was required, and for skirmishing against an irresolute enemy.)

The argument against the three-deep line was made by Capt Aylmer Haly of the 4th Foot: 'A battalion drawn up three deep … loses a third of its active power; it is certain, that the fire of a third rank is of no effect, and the bayonet is no sort of use. To remedy this palpable inconvenience, some make the front rank kneel; this is, perhaps, as great an [*sic*] one as that with which it is intended to do away. The bayonets of the third rank are still too short to be of any effect.'[9]

Consequently, the two-deep line seems to have been almost universal by about 1800, the change from three to two ranks being probably the

3rd Foot Guards, c.1790–96, illustrating the method of firing in three ranks. In order for the rear rank to fire through the intervals in the second rank, 'the right foot steps to the right & the left steps forward … the body leans rather forward'.

most profound deviation from Dundas' manual. There are, however, some contemporary accounts that suggest that some element of solidity was lost by dispensing with the third rank. For example, at Waterloo some battalions formed four deep, presumably to facilitate switching from square to line, as recorded by Edward Macready of the 30th: 'In our condition at that time no power on earth could have formed a line out of us but that of a line four deep, by opening out from the centre of the rear face of the square, and wheeling up right and left, so indiscriminately were the men of all our companies mixed together, from closing in and replacing casualties in the front face. And even had we had time to have made our men step up and make a line two deep, we should have thereby lost the great advantage of retaining the power of wheeling back into square in a moment.'[10] (The 'closing in' referred to a general contraction of a unit's frontage as gaps caused by casualties were filled, so that no weaknesses were caused by leaving openings in the line.)

Lines could be formed in a number of ways, upon the centre or upon a flank company, by the individual manoeuvre of companies, including by wheeling from a line of march. In line there should have been no great distance between companies, the only break in the frontage being the position of the colour-party in the centre of the line.

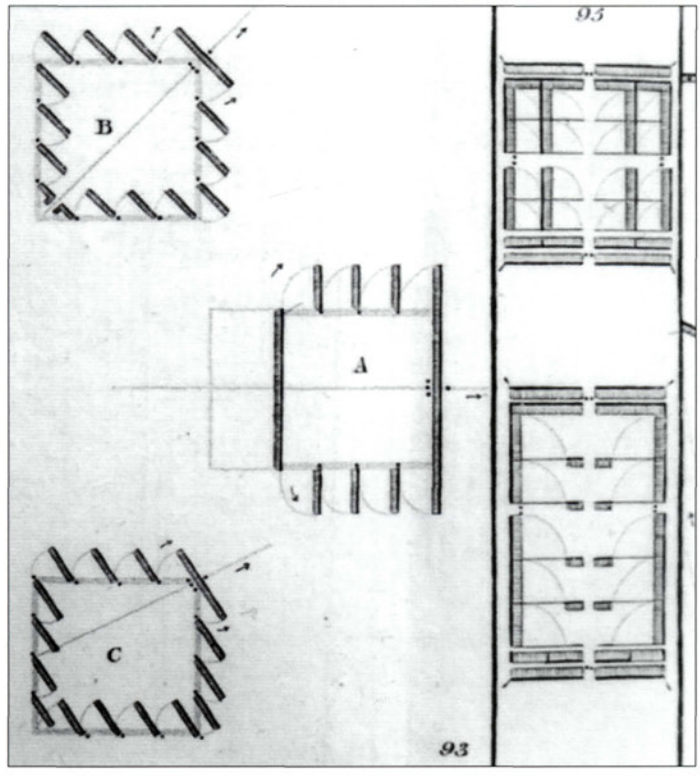
This image dating from 1798, of Sir James Grant Bt, commander of the Strathspey Fencibles, is also interesting in showing beyond Sir James his unit drawn up in a two-deep line. The halberds showing behind them (true halberds, in this case, rather than 'spontoons' or short pikes) indicate the position of sergeants in the third or supernumerary rank. (Print after John Kay)

The square

Troops in line, especially if attacked in the flank, were fatally vulnerable to cavalry assault; but a secure defence was provided by the square. Despite its name this formation was often not a perfect square, and Dundas used the term 'square or oblong' throughout. Its essence was that all ranks faced outwards with bayonets levelled, the front one or two ranks kneeling with muskets braced at an oblique angle so that their bayonets were at horse's-breast height, forming a hedge onto which horses would not run. There were several methods of forming a square, from line or column. Squares normally had faces four ranks deep, although the regulations mentioned formations two, three and six deep. When 'the front rank kneels, and present their bayonets sloped; the two rear ranks fire standing; either companies by ranks successively, or … by sub-divisions, one firing when the other has loaded; or companies by files … the front rank remaining as a reserve. Should the battalion be formed only two deep, the front rank will remain kneeled, and the rear

rank will fire by files.' Dundas stated that a perfect square might be formed from the eight battalion companies, with the grenadier and light companies formed in reserve at the rear, so that the rear face of the square was two companies deep; and Edward Macready recalled how at Quatre Bras his battalion formed square with such urgency that two of its faces were six ranks deep.

Formed from line, the square was hollow; in the centre of it stood the officers, colours and musicians, and casualties could also be dragged inside. Squares were also formed from column. Dundas specified that when marching in open ground, with the possibility of cavalry attack, a battalion should move in column of companies at quarter distance. To form square, the front and rear companies closed up to the one immediately behind or ahead respectively, thus forming the 'end' faces of an oblong six ranks deep (presuming that the companies were formed in three ranks each). The companies in the centre took one pace to the flank, creating a two-pace interval in the centre of the column; then the four sections of each company wheeled, two right and two left, facing outwards: 'The whole thus stand faced outwards and formed 6 deep, with 2 officers and their serjeants in the middle of each face to command it; all the other officers as well as serjeants &c. are in the void space in the center [*sic*]... The mounted field officers must pass into the center of the column, by the rear face, if necessary, opening from its center 2 paces, and again closing it ... the 2 first ranks all round the column will kneel and slope their bayonets, the next 2 ranks will fire standing, and all the others will remain in reserve'.

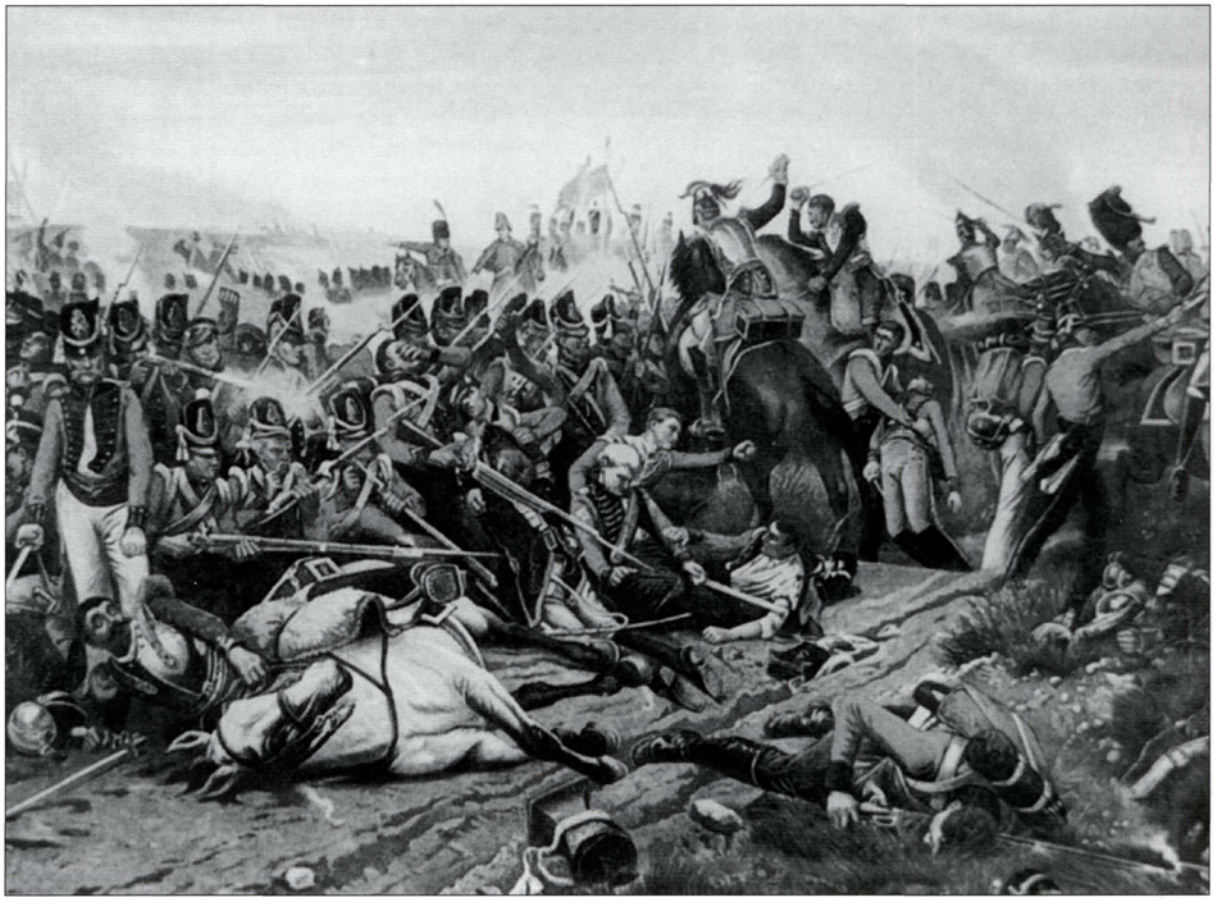


Dundas' own illustrations demonstrate (left) the march of a square with a corner or one face leading, as in the 14th Manoeuvre; and (right) the formation of a square or oblong from column of companies at quarter distance. With Dundas' preferred three-rank line, the two companies at the front and the two at the rear close up on one another, forming six-deep 'front' and 'rear' faces to the square, and the latter face about. Meanwhile the remaining centre companies wheel outwards by sections, to form the six-deep 'sides'. The same manoeuvre by companies in two ranks gave four-deep faces.

Squares could march in formation; at El Bodon in 1811, for example, the 5th and 77th formed a square and marched for 6 miles (9.6km), halting when necessary to repel French cavalry attacks. Under such circumstances it was essential that the troops comprising the square remained steady, as explained to his 88th (Connaught Rangers) by LtCol Alexander Wallace:

> If in danger of being charged by cavalry, he would say, 'Mind the square; you know I have often told you that if ever you had to form it from line, in the face of an enemy, you'd be in a d—d ugly way, and have plenty of noise about you; mind the tellings off ... for by G–d, if you are once broken, you'll be running here and there like a parcel of frightened pullets!'[11]

A square could be formed by more than one unit, of varied strengths. For example, in the 3rd Division at Waterloo the 2/30th and 2/73rd united to form a single square, the 33rd and 2/69th another, with combined



The square; a scene reconstructing an incident at Waterloo, with the corner of a square file-firing against attacking French cavalry. Although musketry could keep cavalry at a distance under such circumstances – especially if successive attacks had left a line of fallen horses in front of a face of the square – there are contemporary accounts of troopers attempting to slash at the front ranks of infantrymen with their sabres or firing their pistols at close range. (Print after P.Jazet)

strengths of about 1,070 and 1,046 other ranks respectively; meanwhile the King's German Legion 5th Line and 1st Light battalions stood alone, with about 472 and 446 other ranks respectively. Conversely, in the later stages of the battle the 52nd (about 1,101 other ranks) formed two squares. However, when attacked by French dragoons at Salamanca the 2/53rd, only about 245 strong, were judged too weak to form a square, and their commander, Sir George Bingham, withdrew them to a rocky hill, from where they repelled the enemy with musketry.

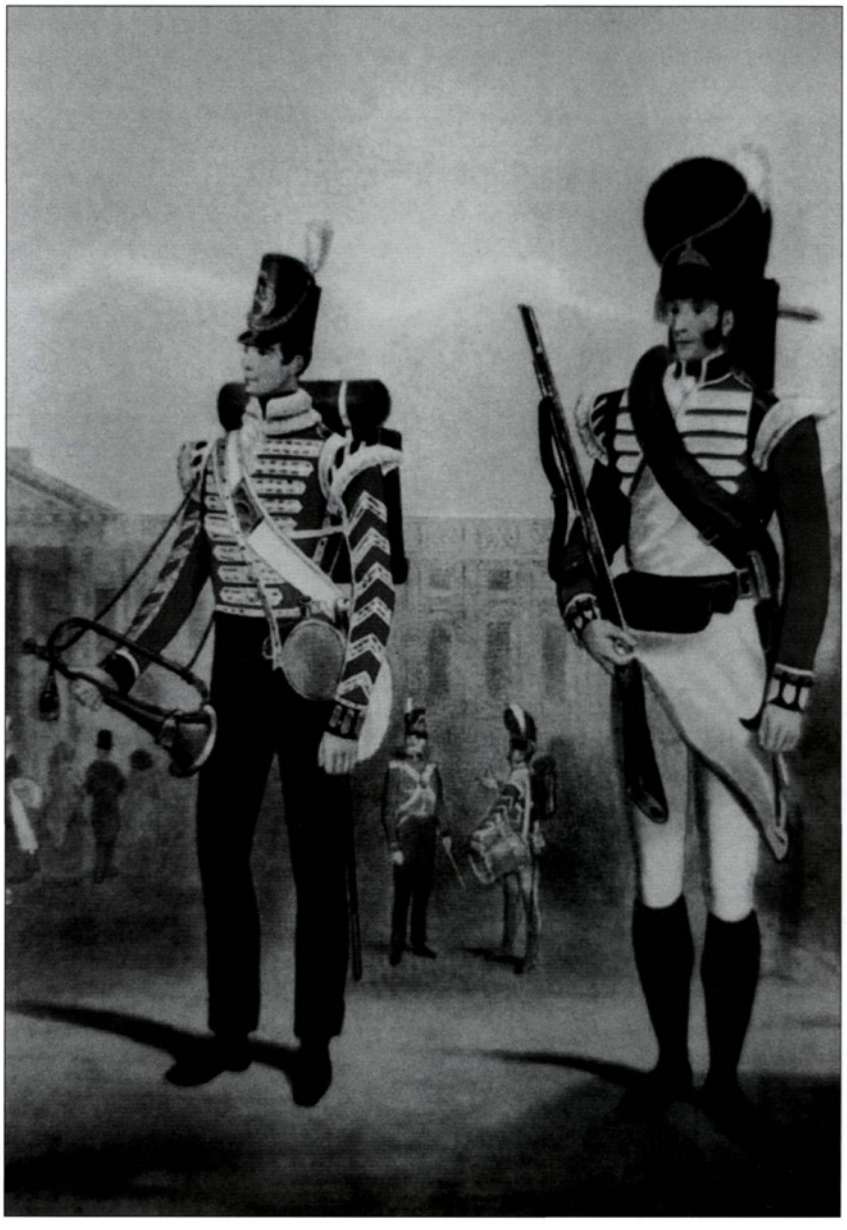
If a formation were broken or if skirmishers were attacked by cavalry then a 'rallying square' could be formed – a solid clump of men around an officer or sergeant; if they remained steady, even a small knot of troops could hold off cavalry. Some commentators held that a square was not essential, but that troops in line could resist cavalry, especially if their flanks were secure. One was Baron Gross, in his light infantry manual, who recommended that if light troops were unable to escape a cavalry attack they should form in two or three ranks with a 'crochet' to protect each flank. The front rank should kneel with presented bayonets, and the second rank fire at close range; following this the front rank should rise, fire, and then present bayonets towards the enemy's horses, with any third rank remaining as a reserve and holding its fire. There were instances where a line remained steady and drove off cavalry, even when attacked in the rear. Perhaps the best-known employment of this tactic was at Alexandria, where it won the 28th its

'back badge', worn by the Gloucestershire Regiment and its successors in commemoration of this exploit; but there were other examples – for instance, when assailed by lancers at Quatre Bras the 44th faced-about its rear rank and drove them off with musketry.

Command and control

Each battalion might expect to have three officers per company, plus field officers, from whom all orders emanated. For example, at Waterloo (excluding the weak 3/95th and the King's German Legion, but including the battalions at Hal and thus not engaged) the average number of officers was about 34 per battalion, ranging from the 52nd's 59 to the 42nd's 17 (the latter having suffered 18 officer casualties at Quatre Bras). Although officers might ride during marches, they served on foot in action (except for the field officers – see the commentary to Plate A).

Although the regulations recommended that commands should be given by voice, drummers were also significant, especially for beating the simpler signals. In this 1790s scene a drummer (in a coat of 'reversed' colour) is beating the assembly to summon troops from their temporary billets. (Print after George Morland)



Buglers made an important contribution to the command-and-control of light infantry; this later image shows (left) a bugler of the light company of the 1st Foot Guards – the bugle is commonly illustrated as larger than the modern instrument. The soldier in the bearskin cap is a pioneer; each battalion normally had one per company, plus a corporal, equipped with a selection of axes, spades, picks, mattocks and billhooks for clearing obstacles or preparing fieldworks. (Print after B.Clayton)

The principal orders were given by the battalion commander – according to Dundas, 'short, quick and loud' – and repeated from right to left of a line or front to rear of a column by each company officer, 'in the full extent of his voice, and in a sharp tone'. If commands were not heard in the din of battle, wrote Dundas, then officers should use their initiative to conform to the movements of the nearest sub-unit: 'the eye will often shew the propriety and moment of movement, when the ear has not received the explanatory command'. Dundas suggested that the minimum number of commands be given, but these could still be quite extensive: for the Third Manoeuvre, for example (forming close column on a central company) the commanding officer could give six 'cautions' and seven commands, while the company commanders would issue up to nine separate orders.

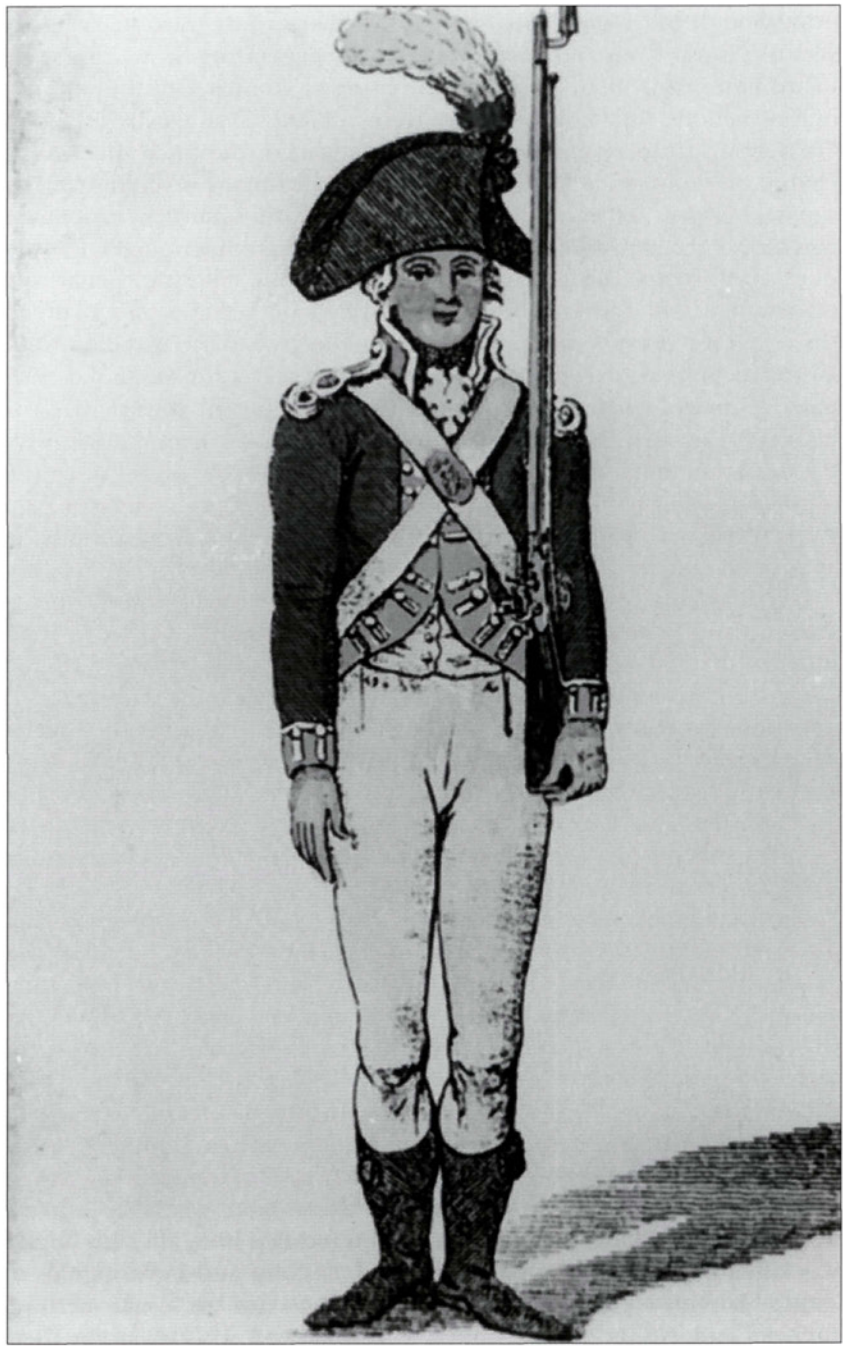
Although the regulations emphasized that orders were to be given verbally, musical instruments also played a part. Drum-beats might be heard more easily than a voice in the noise of combat, but the number of instructions they could convey were limited. Drum calls included 'To action', to form line or column, to advance, 'Advance quick' and charge, to commence and cease fire, to form square or column from square; it is perhaps significant that the call to form square, a manoeuvre conducted on the battlefield in circumstances of greatest danger, was the most unmistakable beat of all – a continuous roll. The traditional role of drummers in action, however, is implied by Williamson's manual: 'In action the drum-major puts himself in the rear of the battalion, with all the drummers, except the orderley [*sic*], to assist the wounded.' For parades or exercises, Dundas stated that 'The use of Musick [*sic*] or Drums to regulate the march is absolutely forbid, as incompatible with the just and combined movements of any considerable body,' since the significant delay before a sound reached the furthest men did not help to maintain an ordered pace; but they could beat for 'inspiriting' a column of march when a cadenced step was not required.

Light infantry commands could be conveyed by bugle, easier to use than a drum when skirmishing and, as Capt Thomas Cooper's light infantry manual of 1806 noted, 'A good bugle may be heard at the distance of three miles' (4.8km). Initially bugle-calls were unregulated and were probably quite simple; but a work on trumpet- and bugle-calls appears to have been published in 1795, and in 1798 the Duke of York commissioned James Hyde, trumpet-major of the London and Westminster Light Horse Volunteers, to revise the existing cavalry calls. His own version of his work (1799) included light infantry bugle-horn calls as used in the Foot Guards.

Cooper recommended that bugle calls be used as a supplement, not as an alternative, to verbal orders, and that they should be few and simple. He stated that only five drum- and bugle-calls were necessary: those for advance, retreat, halt, cease firing, and assemble. The calls he specified, however, included 14 for use in barracks and 37 in the field, from 'shoulder arms' to 'lie down', 'fire' and 'skirmish', and for adopting various formations. He also included a number of informative calls to convey messages from an advanced detachment, such as 'On discovering the enemy', 'The enemy is cavalry', and so on. The use of bugles as an aid to conveying orders is suggested by a comment made by Edward Macready of the 30th's light company, who recalled how, after his bugler was killed at Waterloo, he was compelled to shout and make signals to direct his men – clearly implying that this was not the usual method. Officers and NCOs of light infantry also carried whistles upon their shoulder belts as another aid to signalling.

Regimental bands might play as an aid to morale on a march and even in action, but they were not used for conveying orders. The regimental colours, however, might be used as more than just a rallying-point in action; being so visible, they could serve as an indicator of direction. At Toulouse the 79th advanced in square, preceded by Ensign Jeremiah Balfour with a colour, who 'gave step to the square with as much regularity and correctness as he would have done at any formal parade in England'.[12]

'Shoulder Arms' – a stage of the 'manual exercise', 1790s. 'At the word "Arms", the Piece is at once flung to the left Shoulder, & caught in the left hand, keeping the body square & perfectly upright'.



THE MUSKET

The system of tactics was, of course, inseparable from the smoothbored flintlock musket with which the troops were armed. Many series of contemporary statistics demonstrated its inaccuracies and limited range, arising both from its technical limitations and from inefficiencies on the part of the firer. Tests in 1841 of the ordinary 'Brown Bess' musket (a term of endearment applied to a number of patterns) established the

range, according to elevation, at between 100 and 700 yards (91m–640m), although at every elevation there could be up to 300 yards (274m) difference. The tactical writer John Mitchell stated that a musket could kill at a distance much greater than 300 yards, but added that when taking into account the imperfect way in which soldiers usually loaded and aimed, 'we do not risk much when we say that beyond three hundred yards the fire of musketry is little better than a mere waste of gunpowder'.[13]

So inaccurate was the ordinary musket that an attempt to hit an individual who was aimed at beyond about 100 yards was fairly futile; but the prevailing system of tactics, itself determined to some degree by the efficiency of the musket, required only that a hit be registered at some point upon a large and compact body of enemy troops: 'against numbers, in close order, when aiming at individual men is neither practicable nor requisite, and the main point, therefore, [is] rapid and steady firing'.[14] The effectiveness of musketry declined markedly as range increased. W. Müller, author of *Elements of the Science of War* (1811), recorded a trial in which well-trained men fired at a target representing a line of cavalry; they achieved 53 per cent hits at 100 yards but only 23 per cent at 300 yards, and the effectiveness was considerably less with 'ordinary' trained soldiers. John Mitchell calculated 'that it requires, on an average, more than a day's exertion to enable an infantry soldier to put an enemy hors-de-combat; or we may say, that it requires 100 musket-shots to produce that effect. By some calculations no less than 200 shots are required.'[15] Sir Richard Henegan, head of the Field Train Department in the Peninsula, calculated that at Vittoria one casualty was inflicted for every 459 shots fired – and this did not even take into account the 6,000 artillery rounds also expended. He added that 'the same undue expenditure of ammunition in relation to the small extent of damage done was evident in every other Peninsular battle except Barrosa'.[16]

Experiments conducted in 1802 established that cavalry attacking infantry from a distance of 400 yards (365m), increasing in pace, would receive three volleys in the 49 seconds it took to arrive; and that infantry advancing over 250 yards (228m) at quick march, with the last 80 yards (73m) at the charge, would receive five volleys in the 90 seconds it took them to cover the distance. (A similar test involving a three-deep line took 145 seconds and received seven shots.) It was believed generally that three shots per minute was a fair average rate of fire; some commentators believed that more were possible, but when in 1802 an experiment was conducted, an experienced sergeant of the Coldstream Guards stated that he could have fired at least four shots per minute only if he had put his cartridges in his pocket, instead of having to reach into his cartridge box. (This may well imply that what happened on campaign could be very different from the prescribed drill.) Mitchell dismissed debate on increasing the rate of fire as 'miserable pueralities, not worth discussing', declaring instead that a 'cool and deliberate continuous discharge' was the most effective.[17]

Platoon firing

Schemes of platoon firing as detailed in Williamson's 1791 manual. Companies are numbered according to the sequence in which they fired, involving the eight centre companies but not the grenadiers and light infantry. Each fire is in three stages – the 'time-line' is shown vertically here: **(M)** = 'Make Ready', **(P)** = 'Present', and **(F)** = 'Fire'. Each company 'Makes Ready' when the previous company in the sequence is at the 'Present' stage.

(1) From flanks to centre

Left							Right
2	4	6	8	7	5	3	1
							M
M							P
P						M	F
F	M					P	
	P				M	F	
	F	M			P		
		P		M	F		
		F	M	P			
			P	F			
			F				

(2) From centre to flanks

Similar sequence; order in which companies fired:

8 6 4 2 1 3 5 7

(3) By grand divisions

Four two-company units, plus each flank company counting as one grand division; similar sequence, except that each grand division went to 'Make Ready' when the previous one in the sequence had fired:

L					G
2	4	6	5	3	1

Infantry in line repelling cavalry: Sir Charles Belson and the 28th (North Gloucestershire) Regt at Quatre Bras; note that they are shown still wearing the old 'sugar-loaf' shako. The front rank kneel in the 'Prepare to receive cavalry' position, while the second rank prepare to fire, leaning slightly forwards. This print was made from one of the drawings by Capt George Jones, and it is probably accurate – this regiment, in particular, was unlikely to suffer from a defensive neurosis about French cavalry. (Print by S. Mitan)

Firing

Musketry could be delivered in a number of ways, either by volley (generally involving sub-units of a battalion firing together), or by 'file firing'. The latter involved each file of two (or three) men firing, and then reloading as the next file along the ranks fired, so that a fairly continuous fire was delivered, running from one part of the line along its length. In combat this soon degenerated into a fairly haphazard process of firing virtually at will.

Dundas' manual did not cover the 'manual exercise' (musket-drill) or the minutiae of firing, but it did advocate four variations of firing: directly in front, obliquely to right or left, and file-firing. It was possible for three ranks to fire simultaneously, the front rank kneeling and the third firing through the intervals in the second; but as part of the 18 Manoeuvres it was instructed that the front two ranks would fire standing (the third presumably reserving its fire) except when firing obliquely, when the front rank would kneel and the second rank fire over their heads. (It was possible for third-rank men to pass loaded muskets to the second rank, but as the two-rank line became almost universal this would not generally apply.)

The firing drill sought to ensure that a battalion always had part of its personnel ready to fire, so as not to be vulnerable through being completely 'unloaded' at any moment. Thus, firing a single huge volley was discouraged; Williamson's manual, for example, recommended that a massed volley only be used when advancing on a wavering enemy, immediately prior to charging. Instead, volley fire was usually delivered

by sub-units in turn, and on the word of command ('Make Ready', followed by 'Present' and 'Fire'); due to the difficulty of hearing spoken commands in battle, Williamson recommended that the orders to begin and cease firing be given by drum-call. Dundas provided instructions for firing by wing (half the battalion), by grand division (two companies together) and by company (or 'platoon fire'). Within these systems, fire might be delivered from the flanks inwards or the centre outwards; from right or left flank down the line; or with the right and left sections of each grand division or company firing in succession. Dundas instructed that when firing by wings or grand divisions, from centre to flanks or vice-versa, the pause between the firing of each sub-unit be varied,

> betwixt the *fire* of each, and the *make ready* of the succeeding one [to] allow sufficient time for the first company to have again loaded, and shouldered at the time the last company fires... In firing by *Wings,* one wing will make ready the instant the other is shouldering. The commanding officer of the battalion fires the wings [i.e. gives the order to fire]. In firing companies by *Files* each company fires independent. When the right file presents, the next makes ready, and so on. After the first fire, each man as he loads comes to a recover, and the file again fires without waiting for any other; the rear rank men are to have their eyes on the front rank men, and be guided by, and present with, them ...

A line prepares to receive a French infantry assault, 1812–15. Although not contemporary, this image seems quite accurate: the front rank prepare to fire, aiming low, while the rear rank are loaded and ready to fire; at the right flank stands the company commander, covered from close behind by his sergeant – in this case, a colour sergeant. (Print after Richard Simkin)

> after the march in front, and halt of the battalion, company or platoon firing should begin from the center [*sic*], and not from the flanks [but] in successive formations, it may begin from whatever division first arrives [i.e. when companies came up in succession, or in echelon, to form the firing-line].

Dundas specified that when firing, 'the loading is quick, the levelling just, the officers animated and exact in their commands'; but it is clear that in a protracted action involving file-firing order and cohesion could break down. John Mitchell described what might occur:

> What precision of aim or direction can be expected from soldiers when firing in line? One man is priming; another is coming to the present; a third is taking ... aim; a fourth is ramming down his cartridge. After the first few shots the entire body are closely enveloped in smoke, so that the enemy is totally invisible; some of the soldiers step out a pace or two, in order to get a better shot; others kneel down; and some have no objection to retreat a step or two. The doomed begin to fall ... and even bold men shrink from the sight; others are wounded, and assisted to the rear by their comrades; so that the whole becomes a line of utter confusion.[18]

This was recognized by Dundas, who stated that the duty of officers and NCOs at the rear was to ensure that the ranks 'are well locked up in the firings, and that in loading they do not fall back'. The difficulty of imposing fire discipline under these circumstances was such that Capt Aylmer Haly even recommended a return to the plug bayonet – which fitted directly into the muzzle of the musket, thus making firing impossible – 'by which means you become master of the men's fire; you will never be so without it'.[19] James Anton of the 42nd described an incident at Quatre Bras which must have been a common experience: 'We formed line, examined our ammunition boxes, and found them getting empty. Our officer commanding pointed towards the pouches of our dead and dying comrades, and from them a sufficient supply was obtained... We had wasted a deal of ammunition this day ... our commanding officer cautioned us against this useless expenditure, and we became a little more economical.'[20] This suggests that during firing no attempt had been made to get the men to fire more slowly but with greater effect, or that any such attempt had been unsuccessful.

A more robust method of fire-control was demonstrated by the commander of the 36th at Vimeiro, LtCol Robert Burne, who cried, 'as he shook his yellow cane, that he would "knock down any man who fired a shot!"'.[21] At Bayonne, to prevent troops opening fire too soon, and realizing that 'mischief might ensue from a useless waste of ammunition', an officer commanding skirmishers 'raised his voice to the highest pitch ... when the enemy was close advancing, crying out to his light companies ... "Dinna fire, men, till ye see the *wheights* of their eyes"'.[22] Another factor that was said to reduce the effectiveness of musketry was a predeliction to fire too high; among exhortations to avoid this was that of Sir Charles Belson of the 28th at Barossa: 'Be sure to fire at their legs and spoil their dancing'.[23]

The 85th Regt skirmishing at the Nivelle in November 1813. Although this later illustration includes errors in the uniform (the light infantry did not wear the false-fronted 1812 shako), it is otherwise a fairly accurate impression of a skirmish line. The men are in open order, operating in pairs, and some of them advancing at the 'trail'. Behind the line, in the foreground, are a sergeant (far left) and an officer and his bugler. (Print after Richard Simkin)

Mitchell's comment on how the enemy would be obscured by gunsmoke is confirmed by many contemporary accounts. At Waterloo, for example, Maj Dawson Kelly of the 73rd recalled how 'The fog and smoke lay so heavy upon the ground that we could only ascertain the approach of the Enemy by the noise and clashing of arms which the French usually make in their advance.'[24] Harry Smith stated that he knew the battle was ending by the reduction in fire, but was unaware which side had been beaten until the smoke cleared for an instant.

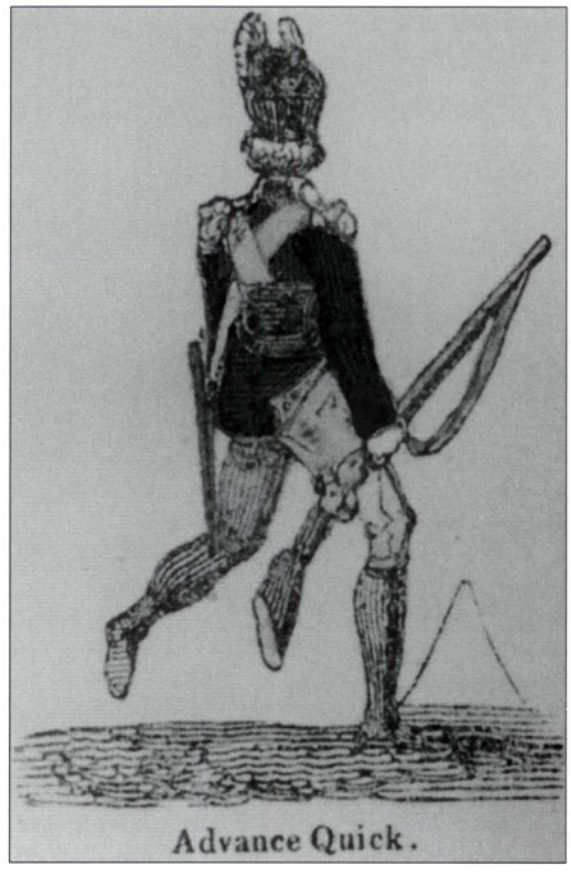
LIGHT INFANTRY

Light infantry formed one of the most significant elements of the system of operation, although Dundas' manual accorded only nine pages (out of 377) to light infantry service. There were, however, other manuals, most notably *Regulations for the Exercise of Riflemen and Light Infantry, and Instructions for their Conduct in the Field,* written by Baron Francis de Rottenburg for his 5th Battalion, 60th (Royal American) Regiment. This was subsequently translated from the original German, and published officially with the authorization of the Duke of York in 1798; it formed the basis for light infantry tactics, was used by Sir John Moore in his formulation of light infantry service, and was supplemented by other manuals. Baron Gross, an officer of the Dutch Brigade, produced *Duties of an Officer in the Field, and Principally of Light Troops, whether Cavalry or Infantry* (1801); this dealt with reconnaissance, covering advances and retreats, defending and attacking villages and convoys, and even defending against seaborne invasion – a pertinent matter at that date. Other manuals concentrated more on the mechanics of drill and light infantry field

service, among the most noted being Capt Thomas Cooper's *A Practical Guide for the Light Infantry Officer* (1806), which explained Rottenburg's system and added further comments. Others included Sgt Weddeburne's *Observations on the Exercise of Riflemen and on the Movements of Light Troops in General* (Norwich, 1804), and Coote Manningham's *Military Lectures delivered to the Officers of the 95th (Rifle) Regiment at Shorn-Cliffe Barracks, Kent, during the Spring of 1803* (London, 1803).

In addition to the light company of each line battalion, there were ultimately seven light infantry regiments (43rd, 51st, 52nd, 68th, 71st, 85th and 90th), which were trained in skirmish tactics to a high degree, notably those in the Light Division of the Peninsular army – the 43rd and 52nd, arguably the elite of the army. In addition to their specialist training all were equally adept in the tactics of the ordinary line infantry. There were also the rifle corps, ultimately three battalions of the 95th and the rifle-armed battalions of the 60th; and the two light battalions of the King's German Legion were also (initially only partly) armed with rifles.

Although an integral part of their own battalions, the light companies could be assembled into *ad hoc* units. Provisional or composite battalions could be created by amalgamating flank companies detached from their parent battalions; these were especially useful for small expeditions, as a way of increasing the number of battalions in a force without greatly affecting the potency of the parent corps. A noted example were the two flank battalions employed in the Barossa campaign, one composed of four companies of the 3/95th and the two flank companies of the 47th, the other from the two flank companies from each of the 1/9th, 1/28th and 2/82nd. The practice was well established – a third of Dundas' light infantry instructions, for example, related to companies assembled in battalions.



Advancing at the 'trail'; an early print showing the method of carrying the musket used particularly by light infantry, but also by any troops 'marching by file' (or in 'Indian file', as it was called from its earlier use in North America).

More generally, however, the light companies of the component units of a brigade, together with the rifle company that was usually attached to each brigade in the Peninsula, could be united into a single unit for action or on the march. Wellington issued a detailed General Order to this effect in May 1809, and a similar one on 9 May 1815; the latter stated that

> The light infantry companies belonging to each brigade of infantry are to act together as a battalion of light infantry, under the command of a Field Officer or Captain, to be selected for the occasion by the General Officer commanding the brigade, upon all occasions on which the brigade may be formed in line or column, whether for a march or to oppose the enemy. On all other occasions the light infantry companies are to be considered as attached to their battalions, with which they are to be quartered or encamped, and solely under the command of the Commanding Officer of the battalion to which they belong.

The 1809 order made it clear that the brigade rifle company was to be included in the consolidated light battalion, which was to form on the left wing of the brigade, but to be posted on the front, flanks or rear of the brigade as necessary for combat or on the march. In 1810 another order indicated that when the light companies were not consolidated, the brigade rifle company should accompany brigade headquarters. An instruction detailing the duties of a brigade light battalion was issued by MajGen Colin Halkett of the 5th Brigade to his light battalion at Waterloo, composed of the four light companies of the 30th, 33rd, 69th and 73rd, commanded by LtCol Charles Vigoureux of the 30th:

> To cover and protect our Batteries. To establish ourselves at all times as much in advance as might be compatible with prudence. To preserve considerable intervals between our extended files for greater security from the fire of the Enemy's Batteries. To show obstinate resistance against Infantry of the same description, but to attempt no formation or offer useless opposition to charges of Cavalry, but to retire in time upon the Squares in our rear, moving in a direct line without any reference to Regiments or Nations. When the charge was repulsed, to resume our ground.[25]

Dundas noted that when light companies were 'in line with their battalions they are to form and act in every respect as a company of the battalion'. Cooper's manual described the essence of their service: light infantry, he wrote,

> are of the utmost utility ... they conceal from the enemy the most important manoeuvres of a battalion ... vigilant day and night, and alert in the extremest degree... In the open plain, they can act as a compact body; in coppices and woods, as light troops; and in the line, as regulars: they can pursue their course with order and regularity over steep hills, and rugged precipices; and through woods and thickets... Depending upon light infantry, an army has its front, flanks, and rear, secured against a surprise... When an army advances in the presence of the enemy, the Light Infantry are in front; retreating, they are in the rear; foraging, they protect; landing, they are the first to jump out of the boats; embarking, they are the last to leave the shore.[26]

To a considerable degree, light infantry service was developed by Sir John Moore at Shorncliffe camp, involving the 43rd, 52nd and 95th – regiments that were to form the Light Division in the Peninsula. The tactics were probably developed mostly by LtCol Kenneth Mackenzie of the 52nd, but Moore added an additional dimension by encouraging the *ésprit de corps*, intelligence and self-reliance demanded of troops who operated independently, sometimes without close supervision. Discipline and obedience derived from pride, comradeship and encouragement rather than from the threat of punishment – a theory at odds with the more reactionary attitudes of the military establishment, but one that proved remarkably successful.

Light infantrymen normally acted in pairs, the file-leader and his 'comrade'. In skirmishing, two formations were prescribed: open order,

with files 2ft (61cm) apart, and extended order, two paces apart or more according to circumstances. Movements were in quick time except when advancing, retreating or firing, which were to be in ordinary time; men were never to run until ordered, and then only at a pace at which order could be preserved. Muskets were ordered to be carried sloped, with bayonets fixed, but trailed when in extended order, and when appropriate without bayonets, 'for the purpose of taking cooler and more deliberate aim', i.e. to avoid the weight of the bayonet dragging down the muzzle. Light infantry were taught to aim at individual targets, and to shoot steadily; as one manual stated, 'light troops should all be expert marksmen. To fire seldom and always with effect should be their chief study... Noise and smoke is not sufficient to stop the advance of soldiers accustomed to war; they are to be checked only by seeing their comrades fall.'[27] Firing was conducted individually, each man firing as quickly as prudent; but in extended order the two-man unit came to prominence, so that one of the pair was always loaded. 'As soon as the front rank man has fired he is to slip round the left of the rear rank man, who will make a short pace forward, and put himself in the others [*sic*] place, whom he is to protect while loading. When the first man returns his ramrod he will give his comrade the word *ready*, after which, and not before, he may fire and immediately change places as before.'

The same system applied when firing 'on the spot', with no movement, the rear-rank men firing through intervals in the front; and when firing advancing or retreating, when the rear-rank men advanced six paces or the front-rank men retired 12 before firing, and the ranks fired on the signal of a sergeant's whistle. When 'advancing covering

Toulouse, 1814: a battalion advancing and deploying its skirmishers. (Print after H. Dupray)

Riflemen skirmishing, taking advantage of natural cover. In the left foreground a sashed officer and a bugler can be seen; to the right, one man lies on his back, firing down his body while bracing his rifle with a foot through the sling – the uncomfortable but steady position famously adopted by Thomas Plunket of the 95th Regt when he shot the French Gen Auguste de Colbert at Cacabellos in January 1809. (Print after Thomas Rowlandson)

each other' the rear-rank men went six paces directly in front of the front-rank men, shielding them while they loaded; when firing from behind cover, the first man fired to the right of the object that shielded him, then stepped back and to the left, to be replaced by his second-rank man. A drill existed for two ranks to fire and load while kneeling, the front-rank men thrusting their musket-butts to the rear and the rear-rank men pushing theirs forwards.

In close order the company commander was on the right of the front rank, covered by a sergeant, the second-in-command on the left, and the third officer three paces behind the centre of the rear rank, with any additional officers and sergeants. In open order the three principal officers were three paces ahead of the front rank, the commanding officer at the right; in extended order the officers and sergeants were at the rear, the company commander in the centre.

Although the battalion light company stood on the left flank when in line, in action it could be divided into two parties, standing behind the 2nd and 7th companies; when sent forward to skirmish they moved around the flanks of the line by files, then wheeled inwards to unite 50 paces in front of the line, in extended order. When in battalion strength, a cardinal rule was to maintain a reserve: half the men could be held back as the main reserve, another quarter 60 paces in advance of them as the immediate reserve for the remaining quarter, which formed the skirmish line 80 paces further forward. Naturally, under combat conditions these proportions and distances might vary according to circumstances.

Another formation, notably used by riflemen, was 'chain order', which required a reserve of only one-quarter of the whole. It was composed of groups of four men, each group ten paces from the next; each member of the group fired in turn, so that by the time the fourth had fired the first was ready to fire again (see Plate H). The enhanced accuracy of the rifled musket, and the great proficiency of the British riflemen, made them especially valuable; a number of accounts from the Peninsular War describe how French units were devastated by having their officers singled out and shot by British riflemen.

In addition to the designated light infantry, other members of a battalion might receive some light infantry training; at Quatre Bras, for example, the concentrated light companies of Kempt's Brigade were supplemented by a company of the 79th and that regiment's 'marksmen'. Such troops, however, were not always fully competent at skirmishing: John Patterson recalled how at Vimeiro some battalion companies were sent forward to assist the light infantry, and 'Getting bewildered among the corn-fields and olives, the young hands scarce knew which way to turn ... and when a blaze of musketry opened on them, from they knew not where, after firing at random a few shots in the air, they were literally mowed down, falling like ninepins.'[28]

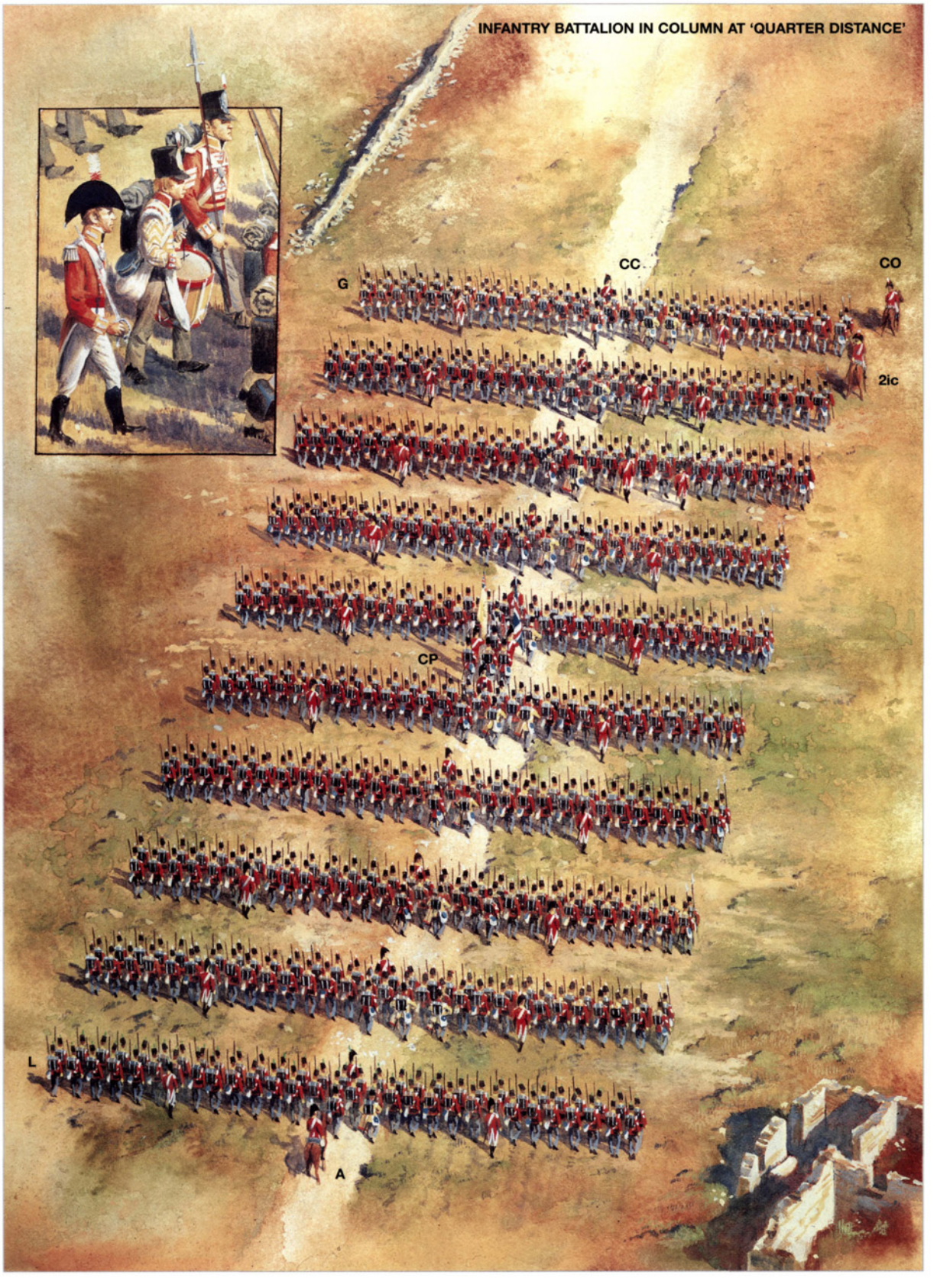
Outpost and reconnaissance duty formed an important part of light infantry service, and was covered in more than one manual. The official manual recommended that if a scouting party comprised a sergeant and 12 men, then a corporal and two men should form an advance guard, with two men on each flank, all as far from the main body as possible without losing touch; it emphasized that the particular terrain should always be considered, and that initiative was required on the part of the troops. Sir James Shaw Kennedy commented on how a battalion should be posted to cover the cantonments of a division: five companies forming outlying picquets about 1½ miles (2.4km) from the division, with the remaining five companies as a reserve 1,000 yards (914m) behind the picquets, four advanced posts 1,000 yards forward of the picquets, and patrols a further 600 yards (548m) from the most advanced sentries. He stated, however, that this depended on the proximity of the enemy; when he helped set the picquets of the 3rd Division in the Waterloo campaign, on the night of 16 June they were 500–600 yards in front of the main position, but on the following night a maximum of 300 yards (274m) in front.

APPLICATION IN THE FIELD

The extent to which the official drill was used on campaign must have varied considerably. When commenting upon the standard of officers and leadership, Wellington implied that not all the official manoeuvres were necessary: 'Subordination and habits of obedience are more necessary than mechanical discipline acquired at the drill... The object of all drill must be to practice and form individuals to perform that which it thought expedient they should perform when part of a body before an enemy.'[29] The concentration upon what was expedient was probably what led Thomas Cooper to remark of 'defile firing' in his manual: 'This looks well, and has a good effect on a day of parade; but it is too complicated to be attempted with safety in the presence of an enemy.'

There is anecdotal evidence to suggest that the official manual was understood only imperfectly in some cases; writing in 1845, 'A Field Officer' remarked that officers learned tactics orally, on the drill field, rather than from the manual; he quoted a commanding officer who told his officers that they were to be inspected on the morrow, and that the inspecting general wished them to look at the book, 'which of course

(continued on page 41)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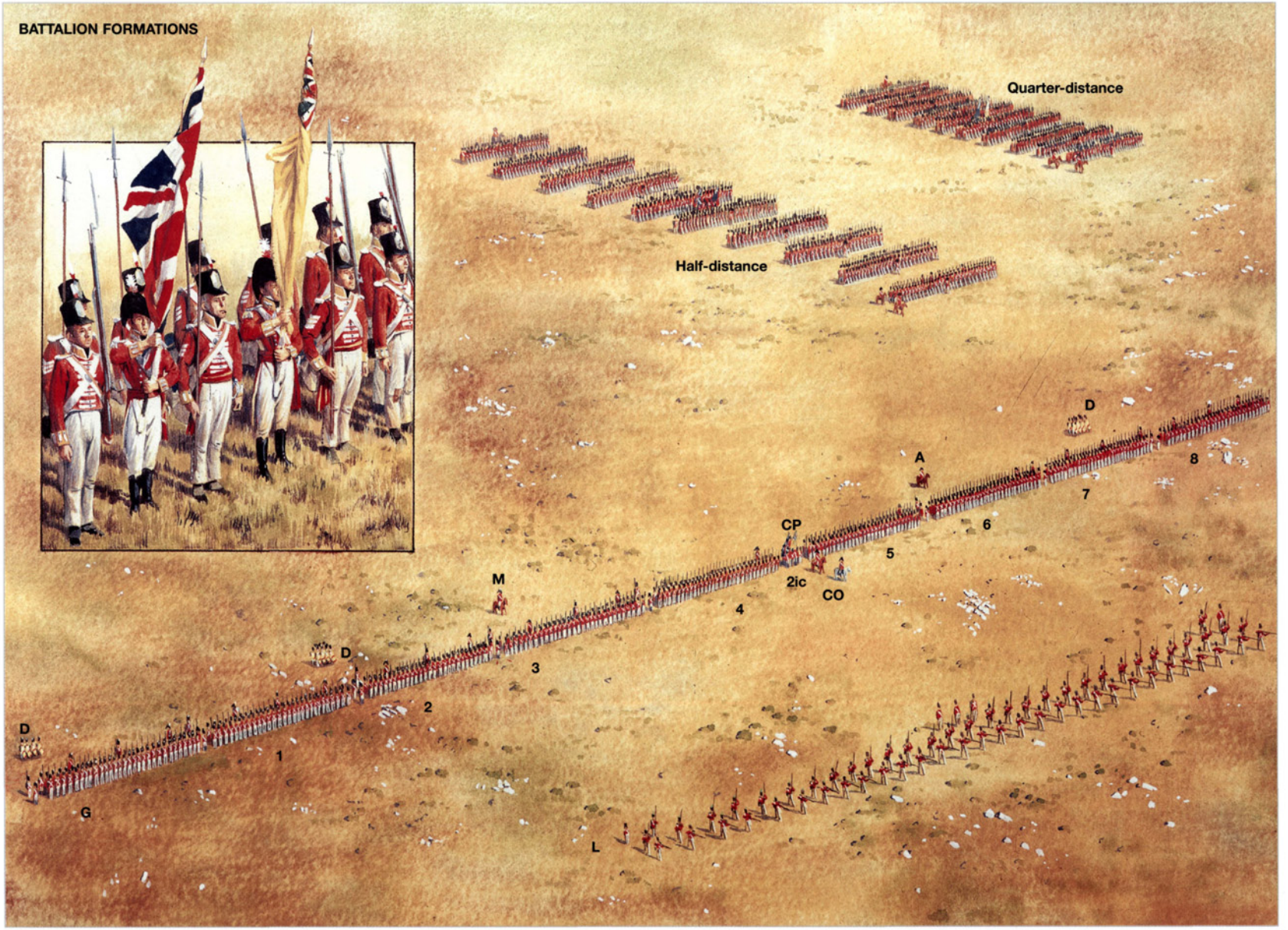
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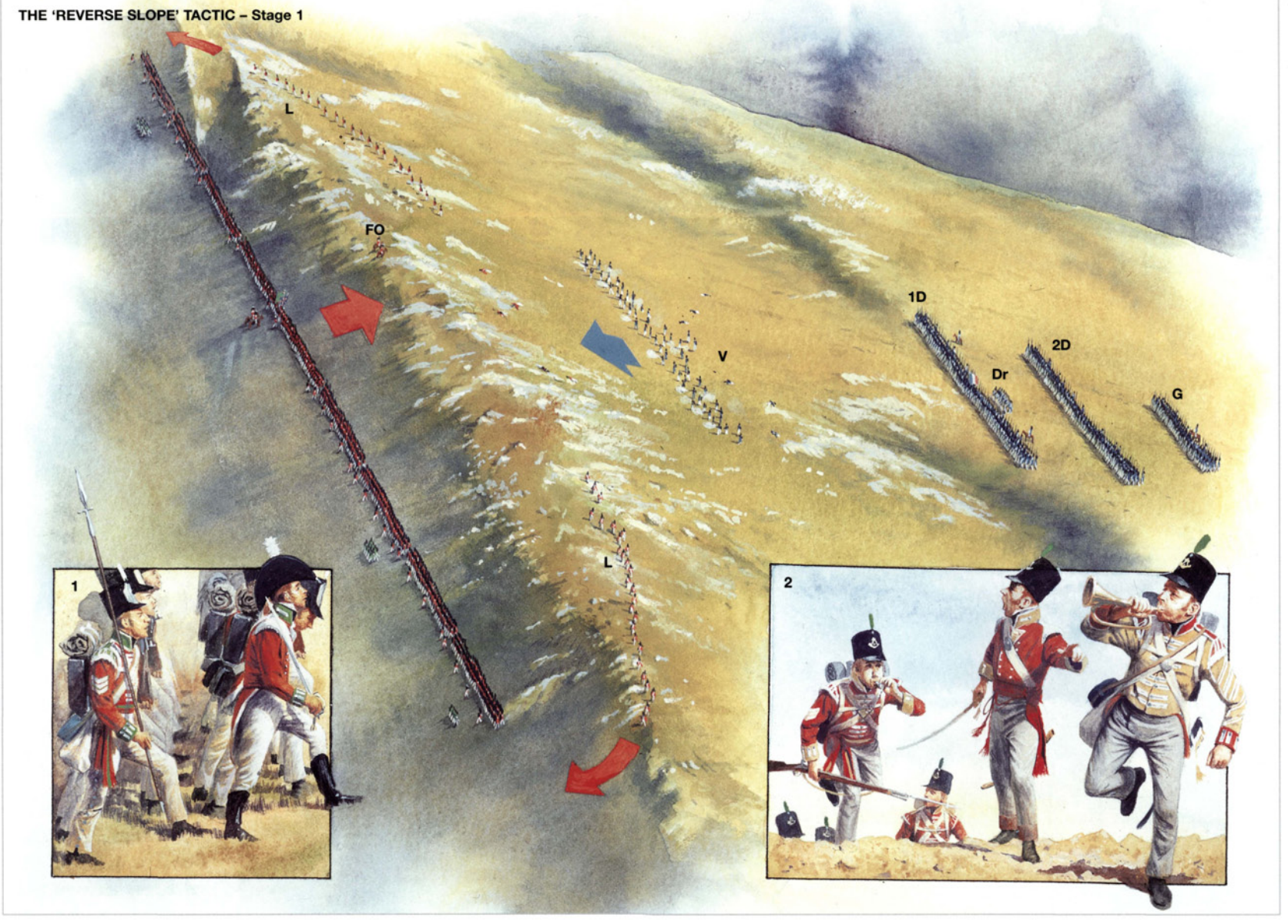

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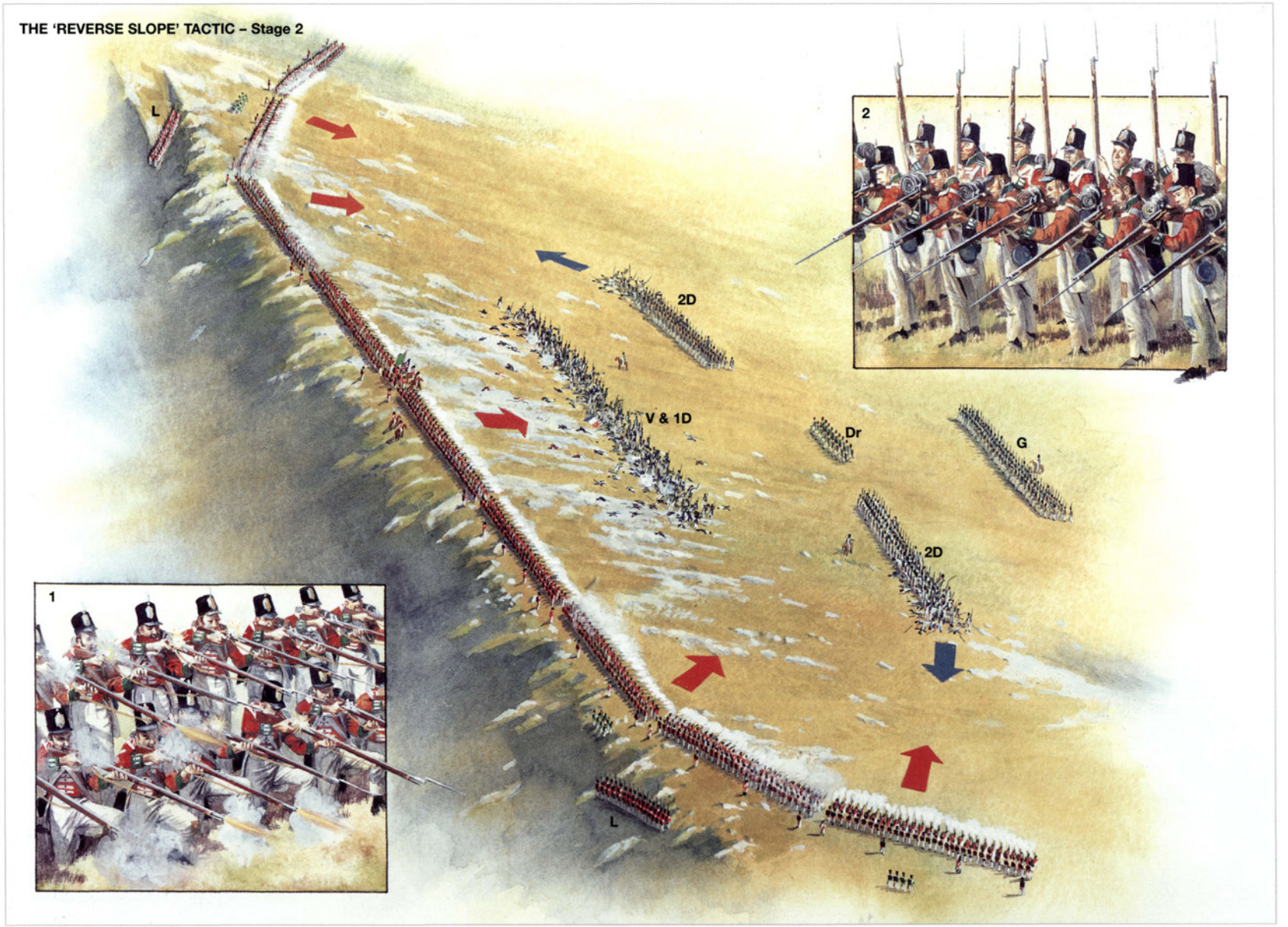

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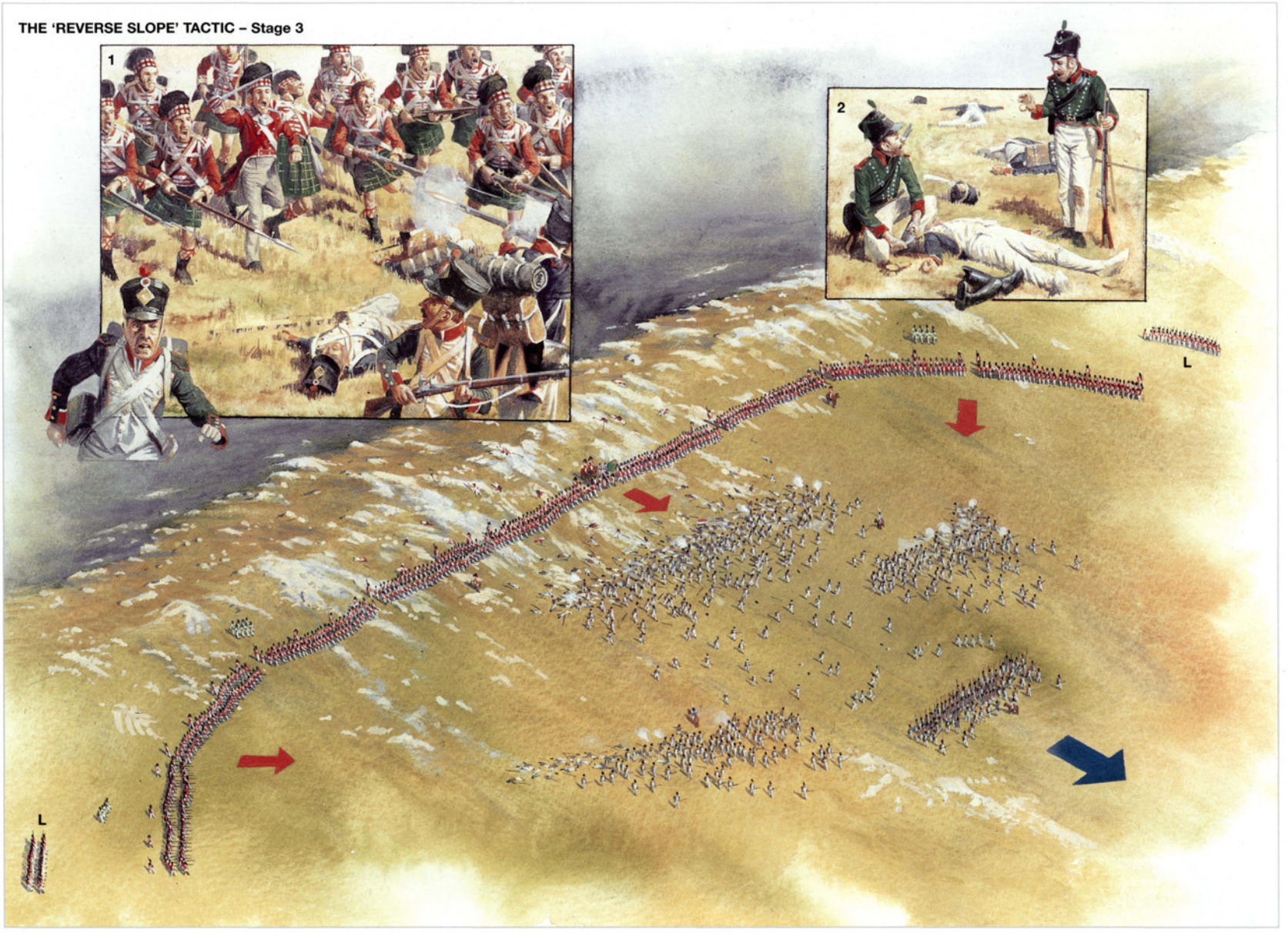

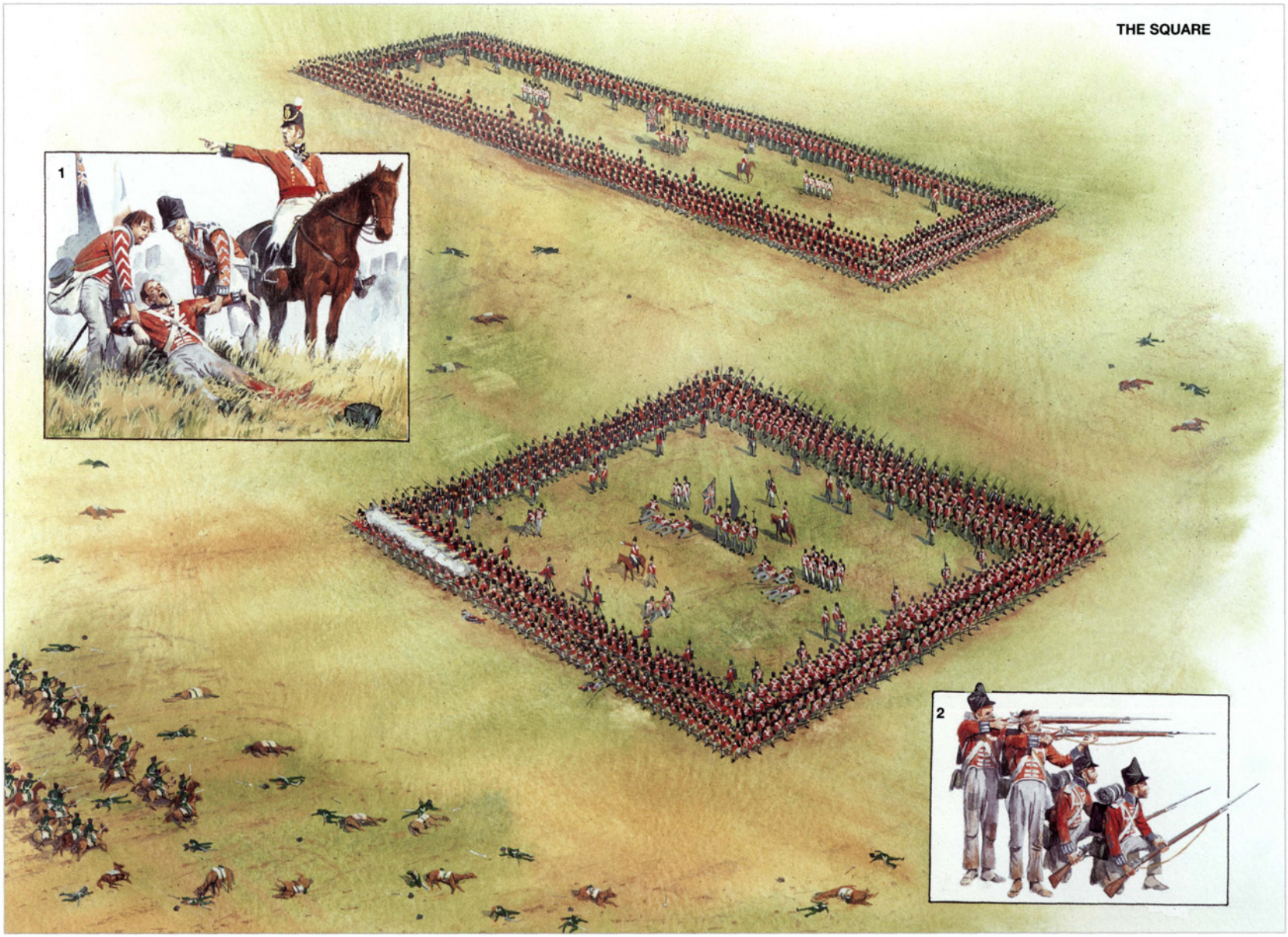
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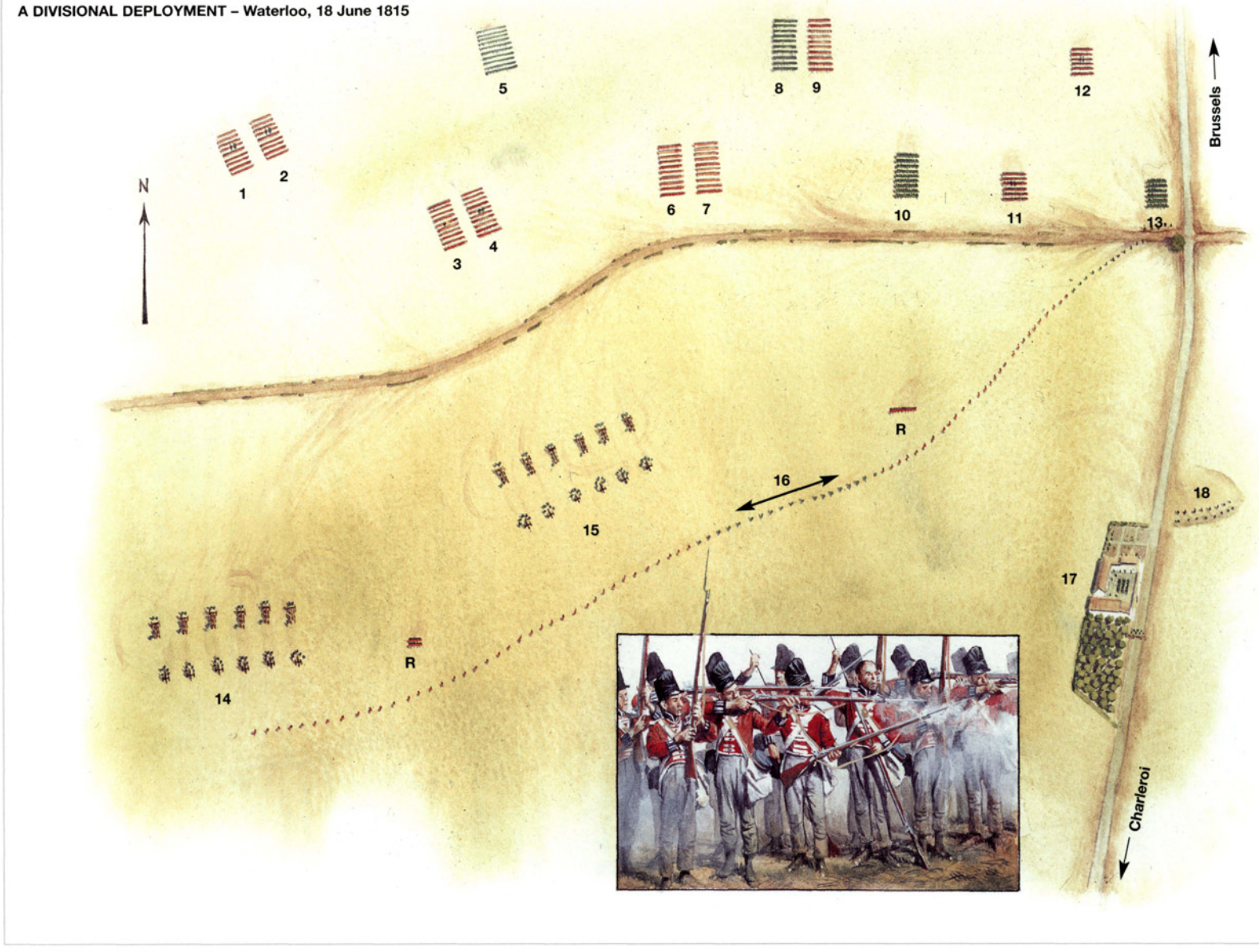
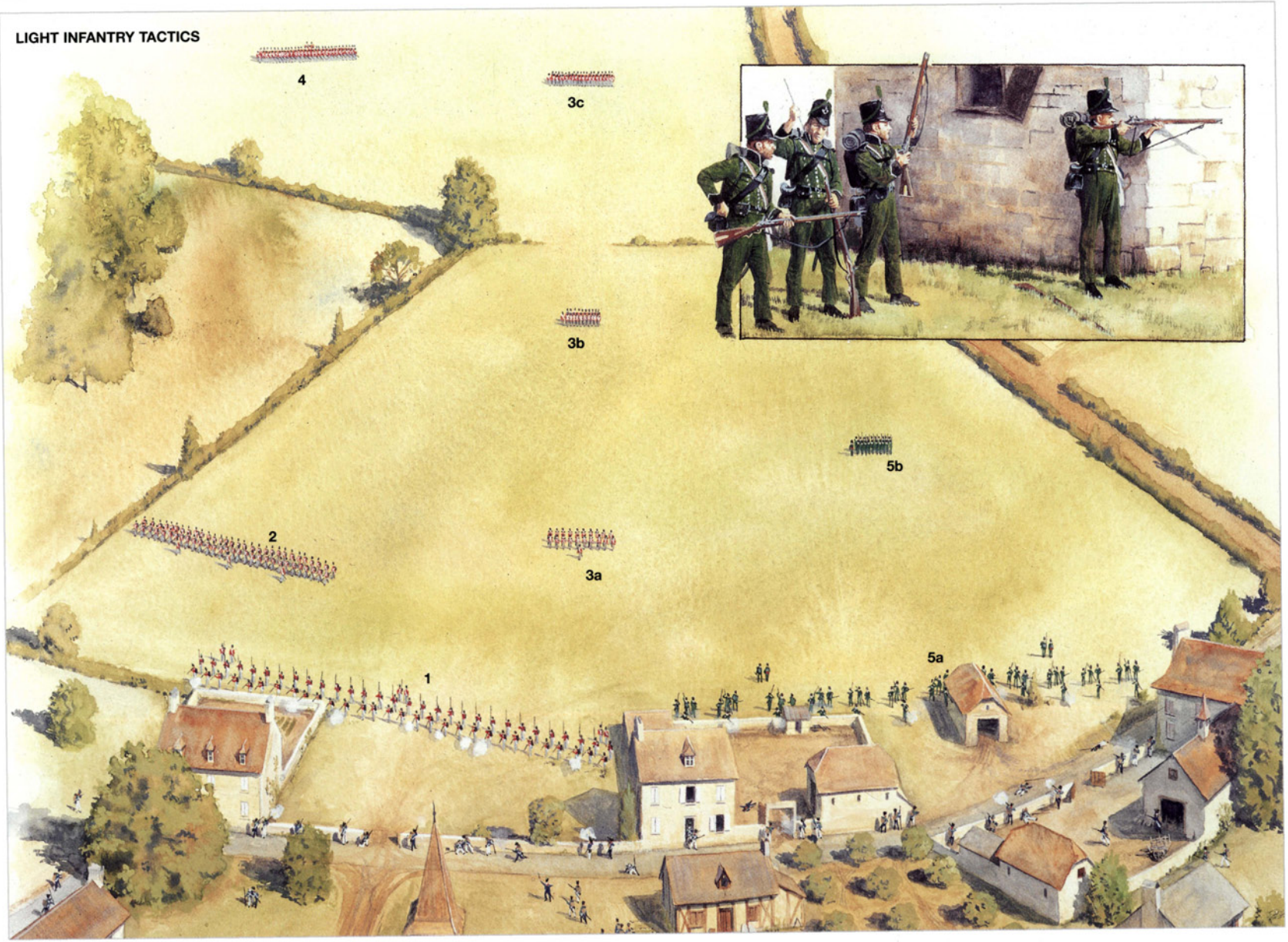
A DIVISIONAL DEPLOYMENT – Waterloo, 18 June 1815




LIGHT INFANTRY TACTICS
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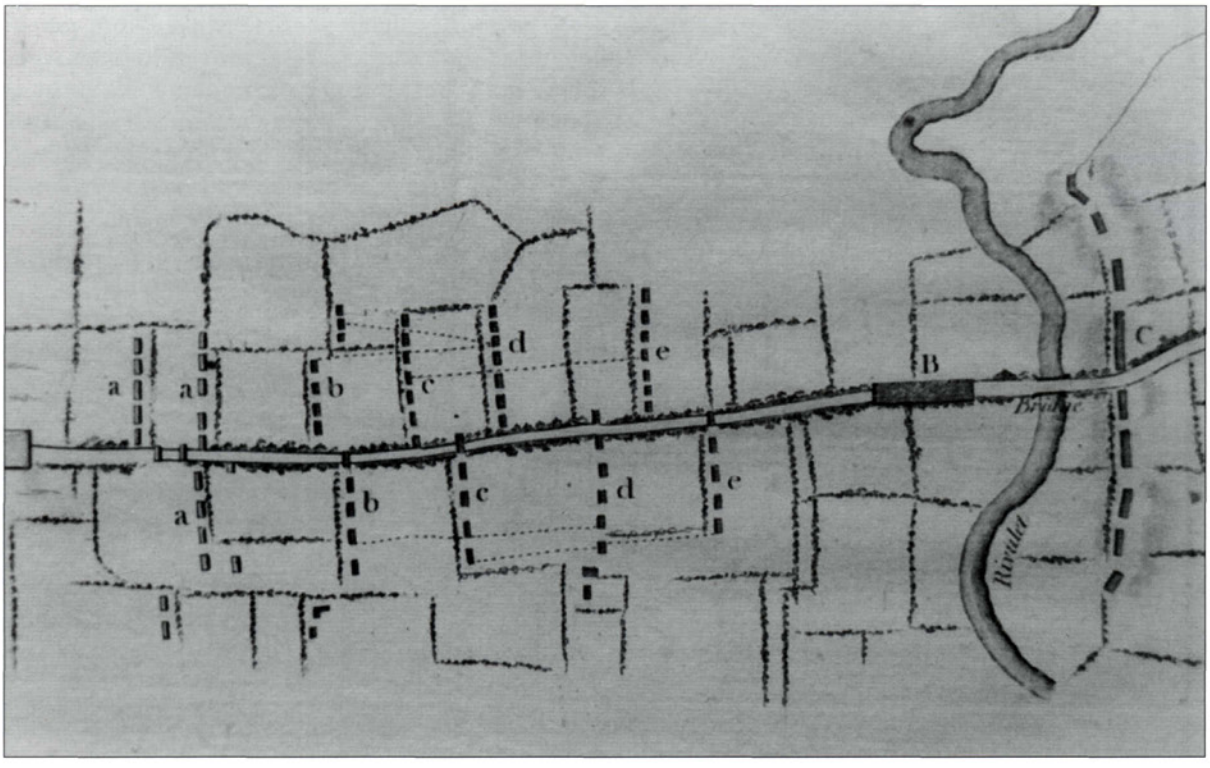
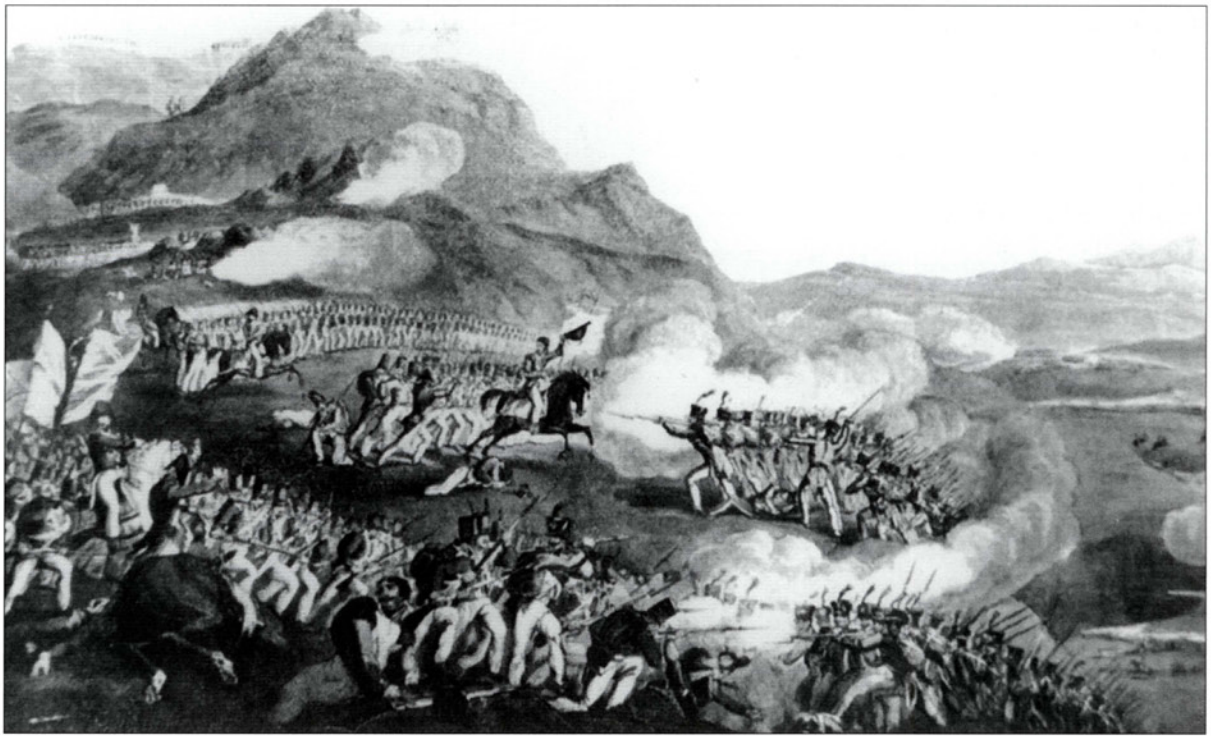


you will do; not that, for my part, I see anything in books or theory'.[30] When British forces were campaigning in Burma, it was remarked that the translation of the 1824 manual into Burmese might give the enemy an insight into British methods; Francis Tidy, who had led the 3/14th at Waterloo, replied that 'there is no fear of that. We cannot understand it in English, still less will the Burmese be able to make anything of it.'[31]

William Grattan of the 88th recalled how a commanding officer got his battalion into square, but was unable to get it out again; after several attempts and increasing confusion, he declared to his officers, 'Gentlemen! I can clearly discern that there is a *something wanting*, and I strongly recommend you, when you reach your barracks, to *peruse* Dundas! Men, you may go home!'[32] Confusions could certainly occur on campaign, and one incident even concerned Dundas himself when he commanded a brigade in the Netherlands. Seeing it in great disorder, 'an old crony and countryman', referring to the 'pivots' that featured in Dundas's manual, asked him, 'I say, David, whar's your peevots noo?'[33] At times the prescribed drill may even have been unsuitable: at Talavera, observing his skirmishers retiring in textbook fashion which he thought too slow, Rowland Hill shouted 'Damn their filing, let them come in anyhow!'[34] The more complicated movements might have been difficult on the battlefield, by virtue of circumstances and terrain, so in some cases training may have concentrated only on what was of really vital significance on campaign. Grattan, for example, observed of his 88th – one of the best regiments in the Peninsula – that 'At drill our manoeuvres were chiefly confined to line marching, echellon [*sic*] movements and the formation of square in every possible way; and in all those we excelled.'[35]

Light infantry tactics when covering a retreat – an illustration from a contemporary manual. At left, an enemy force (shaded block) preceded by skirmishers (a), pursues a retreating body (B, at right), which is covered by its own light infantry rearguard (b & c).

This rearguard uses field boundaries as cover, leap-frogging back by alternate waves; line (b) takes up position (d), line (c) withdrawing to position (e). Once the main body has crossed the river, the rearguard line the nearest hedgerow to the bank (C); if possible they also destroy the bridge, leaving only a plank for their skirmishers to retire across, while they await the enemy. Naturally, movement by alternate waves could also be used while advancing. (Print published by T. Egerton, 1803)



An impression of a classic confrontation, at Bussaco in September 1810. The British 88th (Connaught Rangers) and Portuguese 8th regiments, led by Col Alexander Wallace of the 88th, counter-charged French infantry as they reached the crest of a hill after an exhausting climb. The original drawing was made by Maj Thomas St Clair, who was present at the battle. (Print by C. Turner)

The degree of a unit's experience was also a more important factor in effective campaign service than parade-ground precision. Major John Patterson noted the 2/43rd at Vimeiro; subsequently this was one of the best of the Peninsular regiments, but now, just two days arrived on campaign, they looked splendid but 'with scarcely beyond a smattering of Dundass [*sic*], with sundry evolutions at the double-quick, their military education was supposed to be complete, but they knew nothing of the business' [of practical skirmishing] and consequently 'they were most severely handled'.[36] In part this explains why Wellington was so anxious to retain his experienced troops in the Peninsula, even when battalion strengths had so dwindled that some units had to be amalgamated into Provisional Battalions: 'It is better for the service here to have one soldier or officer … who has served one or two campaigns, than it is to have two or three who have not. Not only the new soldiers can perform no service, but by filling the hospital are a burthen to us.'[37]

Line versus column

The classic confrontation associated with British infantry tactics is the contest between a defending line and an attacking French column. Even though this occurred in only a minority of actions, its essence involved factors fundamental to British infantry service.

The rapid attack by infantry in column had been a major constituent of French tactics from the period of the early Revolutionary Wars, and had proved effective against various enemies. Such advances in column were often preceded by hordes of sharpshooters, who would gall the enemy with musketry before the column came within range. Although the column was the quickest method of moving into action while maintaining cohesion, usually it was intended that the column should

deploy into line just before engaging, to bring the maximum number of muskets to bear. In some cases, however, French generals seem to have tried to use a column to batter through the enemy without deploying, expecting the enemy to be wavering after receiving skirmish-fire and at the sight of a loud and disciplined advance. (One British participant at Barossa recalled how a French formation broke only 20 yards from the British, 'and as they were in column, when they did they could not get away, and it was therefore a scene of the most dreadful carnage')[38]

It was perhaps this tactic that led Wellington to state, before he went to the Peninsula, that he thought the French system a false one against steady troops. Against a column, in which only the first few ranks could use their muskets, a line could bring all its muskets to bear; but the process was much more than a simple calculation of firepower. (Sir Charles Oman quoted Maida as an example of the firepower theory; but when French sources indicated that their troops had also been in line on that occasion, Oman revised his account and used it to argue the superiority of a two-deep over a three-deep line.)

Where the terrain was appropriate, the classic British defensive position was in line on a reverse slope – behind the crest of a hill up which the French had to attack – and thus concealed. A British skirmish line would be thrown forward to harass the French as they advanced and then fall back as the French approached the crest. Due to their inability to see the main British line, the French would be unsure of when to deploy – if deployment were intended – and thus were still in column when the British line advanced to the crest. The latter would fire at close

Rear of an infantry line during an advance – a contemporary depiction that probably reflects accurately the slightly uneven appearance of a line in action. Although it is not shown here there are suggestions, both in manuals and in eye-witness accounts, that the sergeants in the third rank might use their spontoons to keep the rear of a line steady, presumably holding the shaft sideways and pushing on several men's backs at once. (Print by Bowyer)

range and cut down the head of the French column, causing even more disorder if the French attempted to deploy under fire; then, seeing them shaken, the British would cheer and charge with the bayonet, tumbling the French back down the slope. The British would then halt and retire to their original position to await any renewed assault. The Marquis de Chambray described this process from the French perspective:

> When the English infantry is near the enemy ... it generally executes its movements in close columns of divisions, but it always deploys to fight... to defend a height, the English infantry does not crown the crest, as practised by the infantry of other armies; it is placed about fifty yards behind the crest, a position in which it is not to be seen if the ascent be at all steep; it has almost always some skirmishers along the slope, which must be climbed in order to attack it. The musketry and retreat of the skirmishers inform it of the enemy's arrival; at the moment that they appear it gives them a discharge of musketry, the effect of which must be terrible at so short a distance, and charges them immediately. If it succeeds in overthrowing them, which is very probable, it is satisfied with following with its skirmishers, does not pass the crest, and resumes its position... It can easily be imagined that a body which charges another, and which is itself charged, after having received a fire that has carried destruction and disorder into its ranks, must necessarily be overthrown.[39]

The charge, in an image of the battle of Maida in southern Italy, July 1806. In this action Kempt's light battalion were halted in order to dump their packs, and then counter-charged an advancing French formation, which gave way. Note the mounted field officer, and the colours – the colour-party advanced with the rest of a charging battalion.

Discipline was paramount in the execution of this tactic; indeed, there are examples of the British firing and advancing a short distance as many as three times before their enemy gave way. A French observer at Sorauren recorded a charge made by the 3/27th and 1/48th, executed at a run but with such remarkable discipline and maintenance of formation that from a distance it resembled cavalry galloping at a set stride.

The psychological dimension was also very significant. Contrasting with the animation and noise that accompanied a French advance, the complete silence and immobility of the British line was profoundly unnerving to the attackers. Chambray described how at Talavera a French column approached an immobile British line and actually hesitated at the sight. Urged on by their officers, they continued to advance until they

> were very near the English line, when it opened a fire of two ranks, which carried destruction into the French line, stopped its progress, and produced some disorder. While the officers cried to the soldiers, 'Forward, do not fire!' and the fire had commenced notwithstanding ... the English, leaving off firing, charged with the bayonet. Every circumstance was favourable to them – good order – the impulse given – the determination to fight with the bayonet: among the French, on the contrary, no longer an impulse – the surprise occasioned by the unexpected resolution of the enemy – disorder – they had no alternative but flight.

Chambray described another action, at Sorauren, in which the British were concealed on a reverse slope but with officers on the crest observing the French advance. Suddenly the British appeared, 'fired, charged with the bayonet, and overthrew them [the French], but did not pursue; on the contrary, after having remained some time near the crest ... they retired in double quick time [and] resumed their position'. The French were 'astonished at being repulsed, almost without having fought', so rallied and re-ascended the hill, but 'as before, received a discharge of musketry, and were again charged and over-thrown'.

William Napier concurred on the psychological element in such actions. He stated that though it succeeded against other armies, the attack in column 'against the British ... must always fail; because the English infantry is sufficiently firm, intelligent, and well disciplined, to wait calmly in lines for the adverse masses, and sufficiently bold to close upon them with the bayonet'. In a column under fire, he wrote, the cries of the injured and the 'natural repugnance of men to trample on their own dead and wounded ... produce the greatest disorder ... blinded by smoke, unstedfast [*sic*] of footing, and bewildered by words of command from a multitude of officers crowded together ... [the men] can neither see what is taking place, nor make any effort to advance or retreat without increasing the confusion: no example of courage can be useful, no moral effect can be produced by the spirit of individuals'. Napier added: 'Nevertheless, well managed columns are the very soul of military operations, in them is the victory, and in them also is safety to be found after a defeat. The secret consists in knowing when and where to extend the front' [i.e. to deploy into line].[40]

Such deployment, however, could be frustrated by mere self-preservation: recalling the attack of the Fusilier Brigade at Albuera,

Sir Edward Blakeney stated that 'During the closest part of the action I saw the French officers endeavouring to deploy their columns, but all to no purpose; for, as soon as the third of a company got out they immediately ran back, to be covered by the front of the column' [i.e. to escape the effects of the British musketry].[41] A crucial factor was gauging the most effective moment to open fire. Dawson Kelly wrote of Waterloo that 'when the last attacking Column made its appearance through the fog and smoke ... their advance was as usual with the French, very noisy and evidently reluctant, the Officers being in advance some yards cheering their men on. They however kept up a confused and running fire, which we did not reply to until they reached nearly on a level with us, when a well-directed volley put them into confusion.'[42]

The essence of assailing the enemy by volley and charge was not developed on service, but was included in Dundas' manual. The 16th Manoeuvre included a sequence of forming line, advancing 50 paces, firing a volley, advancing 20 paces, firing a second volley and then charging; the light company then pursued the enemy while the line reloaded. The next, the 17th Manoeuvre, was a retirement in line, training troops to fall back to their original position after a limited bayonet charge.

The bayonet charge

The charge with the bayonet was a tactic seemingly almost wholly psychological in nature; charges were normally only launched against an enemy already wavering from the effects of musketry, and who would generally flee before bayonets were crossed. The surgeon George Guthrie stated that hand-to-hand bayonet-fighting in the open field never occurred, 'for the best possible reason, that one side turns and runs away as soon as the other comes close enough to do mischief'.[43] John Mitchell was equally certain: '... in some scrambling attack of works [i.e. on field defences], or hasty flight out of woods or villages, [that] a soldier may, perhaps, have been killed or wounded with a bayonet is possible, but to suppose that soldiers ever rushed into close combat, armed only with bayonets, is an absurdity; it never happened and can never happen.'[44]

William Napier emphasized that 'the moral influence of [the bayonet] is great. Men know, psychologically and physiologically, that... it will prick their flesh and let out life, and therefore they eschew it. Many persons will stand fire who will not stand a charge, and for this plain psychological reason – that there is great hope of escape in the first case, very little in the second, and hope is the great sustainer of courage.' He also commented on the practicality of making a charge, and 'how very seldom a charge of bayonets can be brought to bear; how much firing and manoeuvering is necessary to get close to an enemy ... watch and ward must be kept against cavalry during the operation, lest advantage should be taken of the inevitable disorder that must follow a home-charge of bayonets'.[45]

A veteran of Maida recalled how a French formation and Kempt's light battalion advanced on each other, the French occasionally halting to fire volleys that evidently had little effect. At 200 paces' distance Kempt halted his men and ordered them to remove their knapsacks in preparation for a charge; the French took this as a sign of hesitation, fired and charged. The British acted likewise, but 'the collision was but

Later painting of the charge of the 92nd (Gordon Highlanders) at Quatre Bras. This is probably a fairly accurate impression; charges were not necessarily conducted as a solid phalanx, and some men were likely to outrun others, giving a slightly looser formation. (Print after H. Dupray)

of momentary duration, as the French almost immediately turned, and fled as fast as their legs could carry them' – though not until 'a number of their soldiers had been pierced by British bayonets'.[46] (Heavier casualties were caused when the French were overtaken in a dry watercourse, only escaping their pursuers with difficulty.) This case would seem to support the theory of the psychological effect of the bayonet: that having expected to sweep away a hesitant enemy, it was the French who were unnerved upon finding that the British were not upon the point of flight.

That bayonet fights of any duration occurred only under accidental or exceptional circumstances is exemplified by an action described by John Kincaid as 'one of the most brilliant feats of the war'. In the Pyrenees on 25 July 1813, Capt George Tovey of the 20th advanced with his company in close order to drive away some troublesome French skirmishers. He cleared them off a plateau; but on pursuing 'we came so suddenly on the head of the enemy's infantry column, who had just gained a footing on the summit of the hill, that the men of my company absolutely paused in astonishment, for we were *face* to *face* with them; and, the French officers calling to us to *disarm*, I repeated, *"Bayonet away – bayonet away!"* and, rushing headlong amongst them, we fairly turned them back into the descent of the hill; and such was the panic and confusion occasioned among them by our sudden onset, that this small party ... had time to regain the regiment... in *double quick*. The enemy had many men killed, and the leading French officer fell close at my feet, all *bayoneted*... A powerful man by the name of Budworth returned with only the *blood-soiled* socket of the bayonet on his piece, and he declared he had killed away until his bayonet broke; and I am confident, from the reckless and intrepid nature of the man, that he had done so'.[47] The fact that this relatively minor action attracted such attention suggests that such incidents were exceptionally rare.

In circumstances when a charge was required at close range, it was asserted that this should follow a single volley, with no halt to fire again, in case such pauses caused the advance to stall. For example, Edward Macready of the 30th recalled the order given to his battalion

by Colin Halkett at Waterloo: 'You will fire *a* volley by word of command, and *then* port your arms' in preparation for a charge. Macready added, 'All firing beyond one volley in a case where you must charge, seems only to cause an [*sic*] useless interchange of casualties, besides endangering the steadiness of a charge to be undertaken in the midst of a sustained file fire, when a word of command must be hard to hear.'[48] The same applied to the storm of defended positions, where it was believed a pause could be fatal; indeed, some suggested that the defeat at New Orleans was caused by the attackers halting to fire, when 'One minute would have brought the assailants to the ditch; but in ten minutes' halt the firing of the skulking democrats did its work murderously.'[49]

There was, however, a great difference between a charge from close range and a longer advance, when disciplined troops could pause to fire without causing the advance to stall; indeed, Dundas' manoeuvres integrated advances with halts to fire. Even so, some favoured no halt, and Aylmer Haly even suggested that firing during an advance could have a damaging effect on morale: 'The fire of troops advancing in a line, is not worthy of notice, and if they find it has no effect upon the countenance of the enemy, they themselves will be the first to give way.'[50] On occasion, notably for the storming of defences, troops were prevented from firing by ordering them not to load, or even removing their flints; the best-known incident was that which gained Sir Charles Grey his nickname, 'No-Flint', in his successful attack at Paoli in 1777, when his troops, with flints removed, had no alternative but to rush onwards with the bayonet. In some operations at night troops were ordered not to load because, as instructed for the landing at Ostend in 1798, 'The enemy ... direct their fire from whence fire comes, and at length fire upon one another, by which they become an easy conquest.'[51]

BRIGADE TACTICS

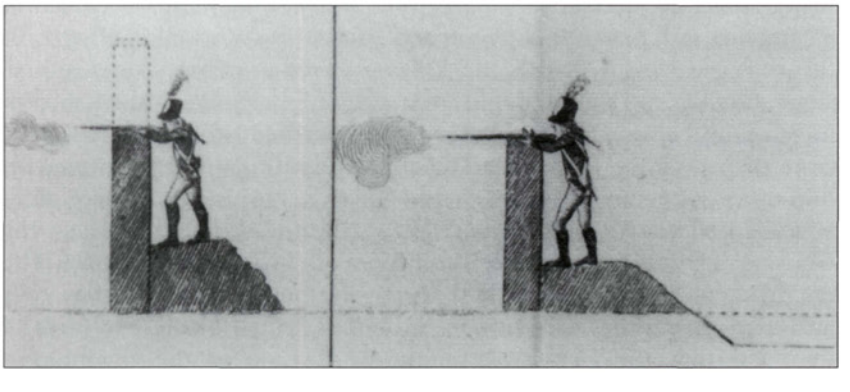
Although the manuals tended to refer to a single battalion, one of Dundas' most valuable contributions was to provide a uniform system of operation for units acting in concert. Before then, as 'Field Officer' wrote in 1845, 'There was no recognised general system ... the wonder is, how battalions ... were ever brought to work in brigade; it must have cost them much time and trouble to instruct them in the particular method of the Brigadier, and till this was done, the brigades were of but little value for service.'[52] As early as 1795 the Duke of York ordered troops in camp to practice operating in brigades two days every week, with a third day at the discretion of the commanding general.

Harry Smith complained that the fame garnered by the basically static defence at Waterloo 'has destroyed the field movement of the British Army, so scientifically laid down by Dundas, so improved on by that hero of war and of drill, Sir John Moore' – that fluid manoeuvre had been replaced by squares and moving in masses.[53] Although this may be an exaggeration, the image of the stubborn squares on the ridge of Mont St Jean may have led the excellence of manoeuvre during the Peninsular War to be somewhat overlooked.

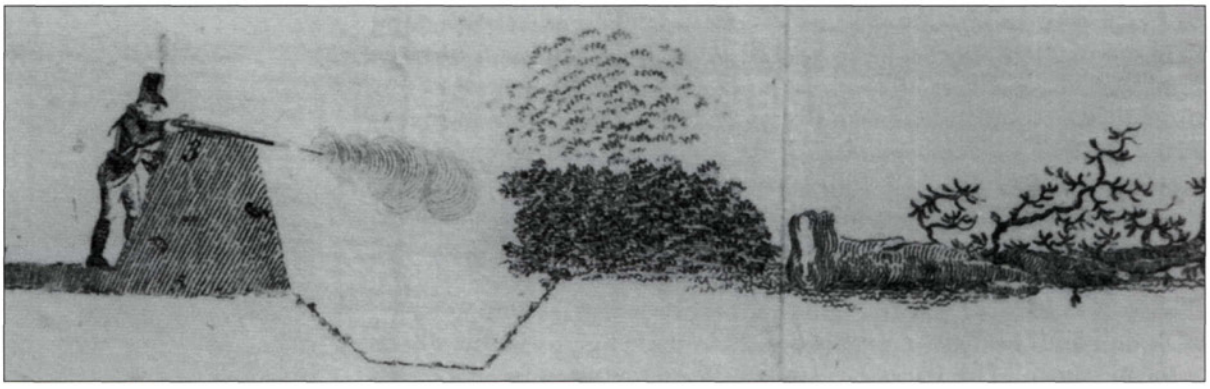
The formation of a line of battle was not usually a solid wall of troops; until the moment when a force needed to deliver maximum firepower troops often remained in column of companies, so that most of the 'front line' was actually empty of troops (see Plate G for the deployment of the 3rd Division at Waterloo). To take a somewhat extreme example: had Wellington's infantry been deployed in a continuous two-deep line to cover their total frontage at Bussaco, then the files would have been more than 4ft apart; and had the battalions holding that part of the line attacked by Ney and Reynier been assembled in column of companies, there would have been a gap of more than 150 yards (140m) between each unit and the next, even if we include units held in reserve or as a second line. (The extensive space between units was, of course, necessary to permit each to deploy into line as required.)

Although it is generally true that manoeuvring was conducted in column, with deployment into line for combat, the system was very flexible. Attacks could be mounted in either line or column, or in a combination of the two – formations reminiscent of the French *'ordre mixte'* (see Elite 159 for Paddy Griffith's analysis of this tactic). For example, at Castrillo in July 1812, Wellington launched an attack against Brennier's advancing French using elements of the 4th Division: William Anson's Brigade (3/27th and 1/40th) in line, with Stubbs' Portuguese Brigade (11th and 23rd Portuguese) in quarter-distance columns on their flanks. On this occasion the charge began prematurely, so the troops became somewhat disorganized and breathless, but the French began to break some 50 or 60 paces before contact. Another example is provided by Pakenham's Brigade of the 4th Division when covering the retreat of the 3rd Division at El Bodon: the 7th Fusiliers advanced in line, with the 23rd and 48th in close column on the flanks. The importance of securing the flanks was exemplified by the uphill advance of the 4th Division at Albuera: Myers' and Harvey's brigades advanced in quarter-distance columns before deploying into line as they neared the enemy, but even then had units remaining in column to cover their flanks – on the right a composite battalion of the divisional light companies and on the left a battalion of the Loyal Lusitanian Legion.

(This action was, incidentally, an example of a formation firing during an advance, and of how a unit's frontage could shrink as casualties increased: the commander of the 2/7th, Sir Edward Blakeney, recalled that as they advanced 'The men behaved gloriously, never losing their ranks, and closing to their centre as casualties occurred ...



Fieldworks – two images from a guide to improvised defences, from *A Manual for Volunteer Corps of Infantry* published by T. Egerton in 1803. This illustration shows how to employ a brick wall 10ft–12ft high (3m–3.7m); the upper part is 'thrown down inwards' and the rubble used to make a 'foot bank' allowing the soldier to fire over the lowered top. 'Chairs, tables, planks laid on trestles or casks, will likewise answer the purpose of a foot bank.'



Egerton's image of 'a hedge (without a bank or ditch) behind which a breast-work or parapet for musketry is formed of sods or earth' [these being dug out to create a slight ditch, as shown]. 'If the hedge be too high to fire over, a part of its top is cut half through and bent towards the enemy, the hedge row trees are felled in the same direction, forming a sort of abbatis.'

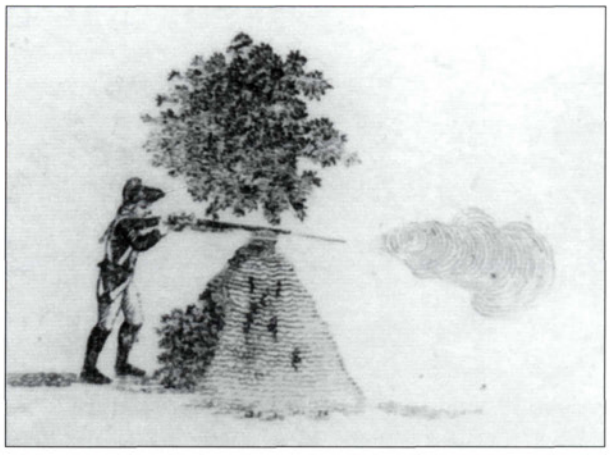
the French faced about at about thirty or forty yards from us. Our firing was most incessant... '[54] John Cooper of the 7th recalled that 'The orders were, "Close up"; "Close in"; "Fire away"; "Forward".'[55])

The flexibility that permitted rapid changes in formation is demonstrated by the account of Capt William Eeles of the 3/95th, whose company accompanied the 71st at Waterloo. As they advanced in column, the smoke of battle suddenly cleared to reveal a large body of French infantry in line, 'closer than I ever before saw any regular formed adverse bodies, and much nearer than troops usually engage'. Under heavy fire, the 71st deployed into line with Eeles' company of riflemen on their right, and drove the French back into the smoke. Eeles pushed on to disperse another French detachment but, observing the approach of French cavalry, retired and re-formed at the rear of the 71st, which had formed square. Several charges were repulsed, and it is a mark of the high level of discipline that Eeles was able to execute a somewhat unusual manoeuvre:

> During one of these charges of the Enemy's Cuirassiers ... I moved my Company from the rear to the right, in line with the rear face of the Square, and placing myself in front of it, kept every man from firing until the Cuirassiers approached within thirty or forty yards of the Square, when I fired a volley from my Company which had the effect, added to the fire of the 71st, of bringing so many horses and men at the same time to the ground, that it became quite impossible for the Enemy to continue their charge.'[56]

An action that reversed the perceived 'typical' encounter occurred at Salamanca, and proved how the system worked equally well in offence, in this case involving a British attack against French infantry on a reverse slope. Leith's 5th Division deployed in two lines, with skirmishers thrown forward, and advanced uphill. A witness described how they 'descended from their position, part defiled through and round a village, formed on the other side, and ascended the enemy's position ... These lines ascended without firing a shot ... It was beautiful, like a review – the General in front of the centre, with his hat off, as at a general salute. The enemy kept their ground, and threw in their fire, which was only answered with a shout at the top of the hill. When within five yards of their columns the General brought the division to the charge, and

successively walked over their different lots of columns ... The regularity of a parade was preserved throughout; the cannonade [they sustained] only made them more steady; had the hills been made of red hot iron, they would have been carried.'[57] The French, concealed on the reverse slope in squares but for their skirmishers – who were driven back by the British light troops – fired as soon as the British appeared over the crest, and immediately Leith ordered his line to fire and charge, which swept away the French in moments.



Egerton's image of a hedge with a bank, the latter turned into a parapet by adding earth to increase its thickness so as to be proof against musket-balls and canister shot.

The experience of the 3rd Division in the same action was not dissimilar, advancing against French columns on higher ground. Grattan of the 88th described how the divisional commander, Sir Edward Pakenham, advanced in four 'columns', the outer two of protective cavalry. The three battalions of Wallace's Brigade

> advanced in open column until within 250 yards of the ridge held by the French infantry ... whose light troops hoping to take advantage of the time which the deploying from column into line would take, run [*sic*] down the face of the hill in a state of great excitement; but Pakenham told Wallace to form line from open column without halting, and thus the different companies, by throwing forward their right shoulders were in line without the slow manoeuvre of a deployment. Astonished at the rapidity of the movement, the French ... commenced an irregular and hurried fire... The manoeuvre was a bold, as well as a novel one, and the appearance of the brigade imposing and unique, because it so happened that all the British officers were in front of their men – a rare occurrence... They speedily got footing upon the brow of the hill, but before they had time to take breath [the French] division ... ran forward to meet them, and belching forth a torrent of bullets ... brought down almost the entire of Wallace's first rank... The brigade staggered back from the force of the shock, but before the smoke had altogether cleared away, Wallace ... pointed to the French column, and leading the shattered brigade up the hill ... brought them face to face ... astounded by the determination of Wallace's soldiers [the French] wavered; nevertheless they opened a heavy discharge of musketry, but ... it was irregular and ill-directed... At length their fire ceased altogether, and the three [British] regiments, for the first time, *cheered!* The effect was electric ... [the French] were seized with panic ... and as they stood to receive the shock they were about to be assailed with, they reeled to and fro like men intoxicated... The three regiments ran onward, and the mighty phalanx, which but a moment before was so formidable, loosened and fell in pieces before fifteen hundred invincible British soldiers in a line of only two deep.'[58]

This account rather simplifies the events, but is testimony to the significance of discipline, training and morale.

SPECIAL OPERATIONS

Storming

The assault of defended positions varied, from relatively simple attacks upon buildings or villages to full-blown storms of breaches in the defences of a fortress. A drill existed for 'street firing' (which Thomas Cooper suggested was too complicated to be attempted in the presence of the enemy). In this, a battalion formed in close column of companies, two deep and led by the grenadiers; the drummers, colours, pioneers and supernumeraries remained at the rear, protected by the light company, which was not involved. In advancing, the grenadiers fired, then wheeled outwards in two bodies, one right and one left, whereupon the following company advanced past them, fired, and wheeled to the flanks in their turn. This process continued until the last company had passed the grenadiers, who then wheeled inwards and reformed, for the whole process to begin again. In retreating, the leading company fired, wheeled outwards in two bodies as before, then fell back along the flanks of the column until they reached the rear, where they re-formed and reloaded, and each successive company did likewise. The light company and the personnel it protected fell back progressively so as always to be behind the company re-forming at the tail of the column.

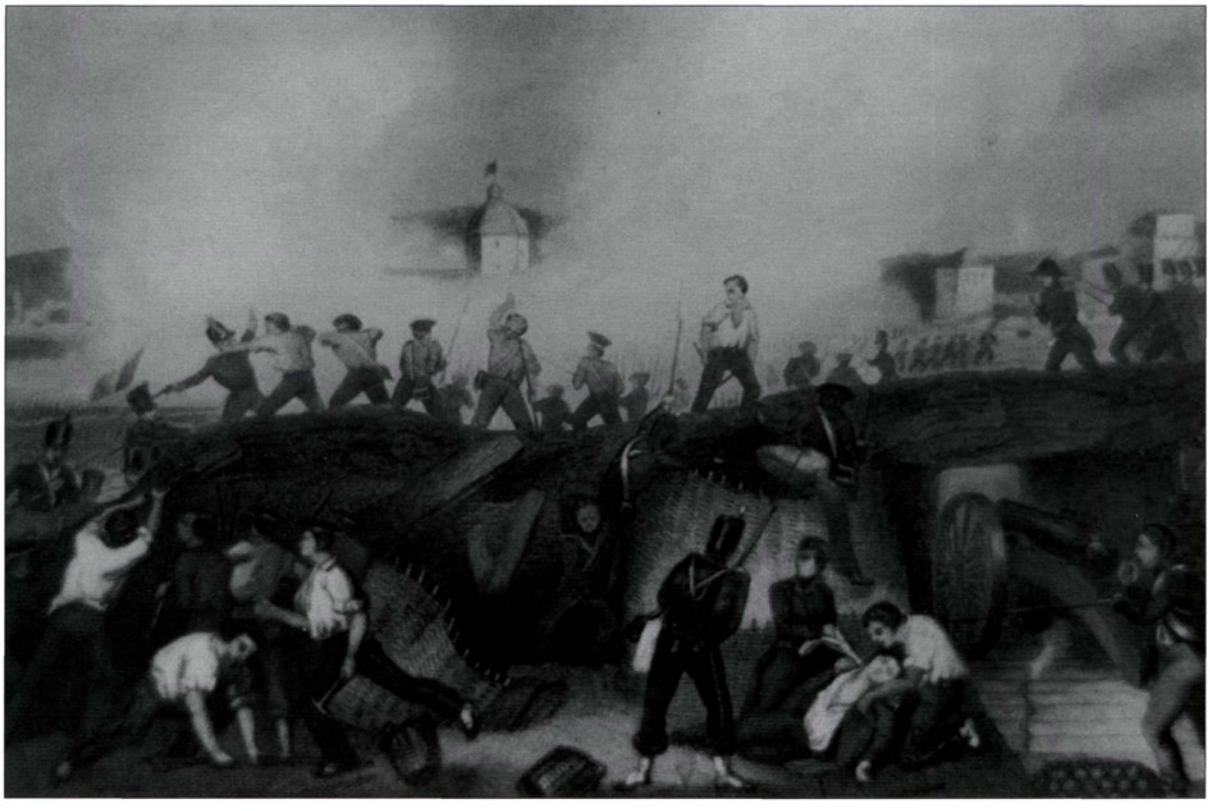
In reality, fighting in streets or against occupied buildings was usually confused, difficult and unscientific; no prescribed drill existed and probably little or no training was undertaken. An example was described by Edward Macready: Maj Thomas Chambers of the 30th, with two

Street fighting in Buenos Aires, April 1807 – a failure which led to the withdrawal of the British expedition and the dismissal of its commander, Gen John Whitelocke. The confusion attendant on storming defended buildings, and fighting in often narrow streets overlooked by the enemy, naturally defied any attempt to formulate a comprehensive system of drills.

Street fighting in Bergen-op-Zoom, March 1814. Again there was much confusion, and the operation was comparable to the disaster at Buenos Aires seven years before. The drill for 'street firing' produced a murderous series of volleys in rapid succession aimed ahead down a street, but offered no counter to attacks from sidestreets or other vantage points.

companies and some skirmishers, attacked a defended house at Quatre Bras. 'We rushed into the court-yard, were met by a smart fire, and made a botch of it. The Major recalled us into the orchard, told the men what to do, and it was carried in an instant by battering open the door, and ramming the muskets into the windows.'[59] Some accounts of fighting in built-up areas emphasize the element of confusion, where much depended upon the initiative of leaders of small parties, since circumstances obviously prevented senior officers from influencing events outside their own immediate vicinity.

Some privately published manuals did make reference to defensive positions and the utilization of fieldworks, and for the defence of a fortified position there was a drill for 'parapet firing', by which bodies of troops advanced to fire over the wall of a fortification, then retired to reload and were replaced by successive detachments. In practice, however, the defence of fortified positions used the same skills as applied in the open field. During the battle of the Nive, for example, the 43rd used the church at Arcangues as the centre of their defensive position, placing two companies in the church itself and the remainder behind the church wall. This permitted three tiers of men to fire simultaneously, from behind the wall, from the church windows on the ground floor, and through the clerestory windows of an elevated gallery that ran around the interior. When French artillery was moved to within 400 yards (365m), the 43rd began firing by volley, their elevated position evidently permitting their musketry to be effective at a greater range than normal; it proved so effective that the French withdrew their guns, relieving the pressure on the position.



In the trenches at Ciudad Rodrigo the infantry provided almost all the labour for constructing the siege works. The engineer Sir John Jones, who served at Ciudad Rodrigo and Badajoz, calculated that to besiege a garrison of 5,000 enemy, 8,000 men would be required to do the manual labour, with a trench-guard of infantry in three shifts each of 3,750 men – an enormous investment in manpower. (Print by Terry & Pound)

The most dangerous duty that could be undertaken was the storming of a breach in a fortress wall. For this the attackers might be divided into three parts: the advance and main bodies and the covering parties. Those who led the assault were the 'forlorn hope' (an old term derived phonetically from the Dutch *verloren hoop,* 'lost party' – which expressed the hazards of this mission). They were usually selected from volunteers, of which there was never a shortage – indeed, there was usually fierce competition for a place. Near to the front of the attack might be men carrying bags of grass (upon which to jump, to soften the impact of landing in the fortress ditch), and ladders to enable them to climb in and out of it, while the covering parties would attempt to keep down the heads of the defenders to reduce the amount of fire directed against the stormers.

Although 'storming' was not covered in the manoeuvre regulations the essence may be found in the instructions issued before a storm, for example those for the attack on the breaches at Badajoz in April 1812 by the 4th and Light Divisions, simultaneously with the attack by escalade on the castle by the 3rd Division. The orders provided for covering fire by howitzers, to cease when the 3rd Division got into the castle; but they mainly concerned the infantry assault on the breaches:

> The Light Division must throw 100 men forward into the quarries, close to the covered-way of the bastion of Sta Maria who, as soon as the garrison are disturbed, must keep down by their fire the fire from the face of the bastion of Sta Maria, and that from the covered way. The advance of both divisions must

consist of 500 men from each, attended by 12 ladders; and the men of the storming party should carry sacks filled with light materials, to be thrown into the ditch, to enable the troops to descend into it... The advance of both divisions must be formed into firing parties and storming parties. The firing parties must be spread along the crest of the glacis, to keep down the fire of the enemy; while the men of the storming party, who carry bags, will enter the covered way at the *place d'armes*... The heads of the two divisions will follow their advanced guards, keeping nearly together, but they will not advance beyond the shelter afforded by the quarries on the left of the road, till they shall have seen the heads of the advanced guards ascend the breaches; they will then move forward to the storm in double quick time... The heads of the columns should be brought as near as they can without being exposed to fire... Each division must leave 1,000 men in reserve in the quarries... The soldiers must leave their knapsacks in camp... Twelve carpenters with axes, and ten miners with crow-bars [and] one officer and twenty artillerymen must be with each division... The Commander of the Forces particularly requests the General Officers commanding divisions and brigades, and the Commanding Officers of regiments, and the Officers commanding companies, to impress upon their men the necessity of keeping together, and formed as a military body after the storm, and during the night. Not only the success of the operation, and the honor [*sic*] of the army, but their own individual safety, depend upon their being in a situation to repel any attack by the enemy, and to overcome all resistance which they may be inclined to make, till the garrison are completely subdued.[60]

Despite heroic efforts and great loss of life, the assault of the breaches did not succeed. (Neither did the troops keep together after the fortress was captured following success at the castle – a collapse of discipline led to the infamous outbreak of looting and rape.)

Further details of the process of 'storming' are recorded in the orders for the assault on Ciudad Rodrigo some weeks earlier. The scaling ladders were either 12ft or 25ft long (3.6m or 7.6m), depending upon their intended point of use, each ladder to be carried by three men. Each detachment was provided with axes to cut down any obstacles 'which may have been erected to impede the communication along the ditch'; and 'The men with ladders, and axes, and bags, must not have their arms; those who are to storm, must not fire.'[61] John Kincaid of the 95th stated that at Ciudad Rodrigo the 'stormers' from his regiment were 'loaded' but did not fire until they were clear of the breach; this remarkable discipline led another witness to state that their not firing had deceived him into believing that they, like their comrades of the 43rd and 52nd, had not loaded – the consequence, he noted, of the riflemen being the veterans of four campaigns.

Amphibious operations

Amphibious operations, notably the landing of troops on beaches, were not covered by the official manuals, although a number of such landings

Storming a breach – this was probably the most hazardous of any of the duties faced by infantrymen. As Kincaid wrote of Badajoz, it could be 'as respectable a representation of hell itself as fire, and sword, and human sacrifices could make it'.

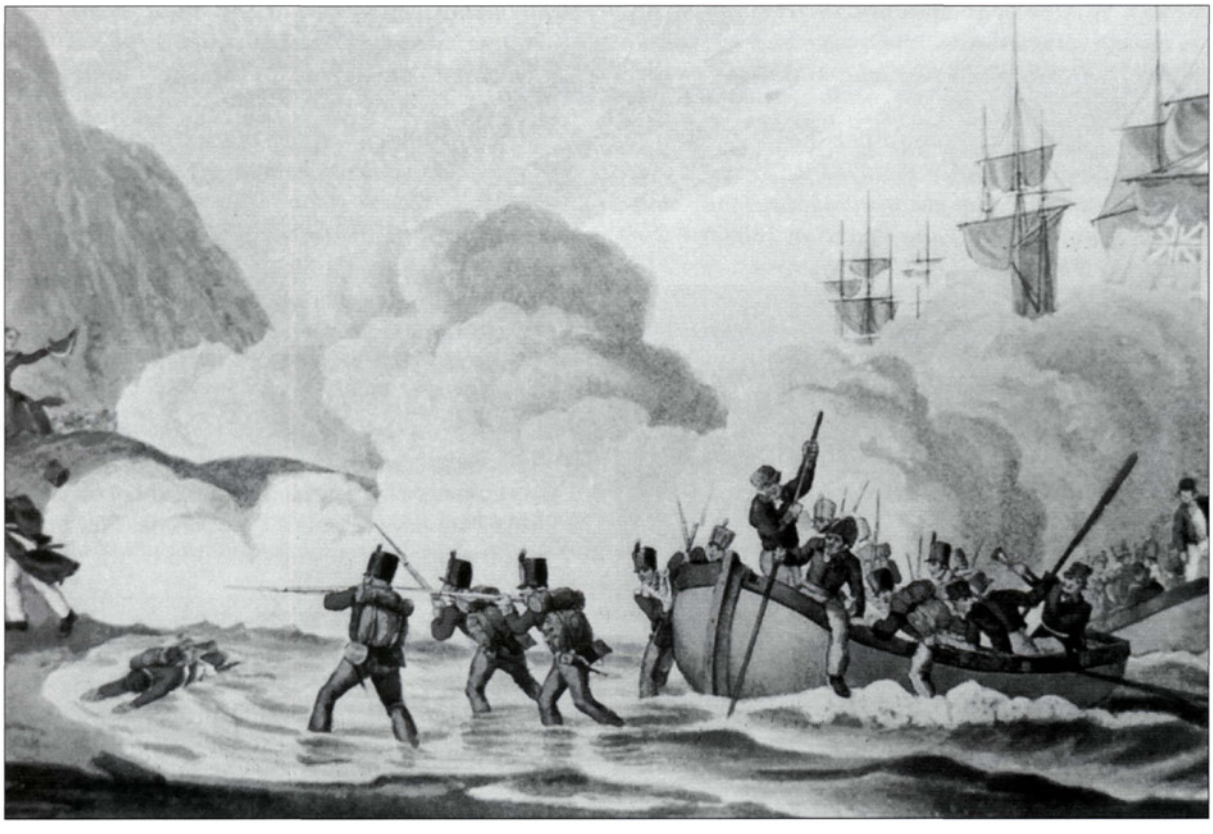
were undertaken during the period. Some of these were executed in the face of enemy opposition. Although, for example, the Helder expedition of 1799 was not actually engaged during the process of landing, but only after the advance guard got ashore, the landing at Aboukir in March 1801 was opposed stoutly, with a heavy fire directed against the landing craft while they were still at sea.

Because of the nature of such operations a tactical plan was essential, as described by Charles James in his *Regimental Companion* of 1800:

> When the signal is given for landing, the soldiers should be placed in the boats without hurry, noise, or confusion; and, if there be room, should be ordered to sit down immediately, resting their firelocks upon the ground, between their legs. On these occasions, it is particularly incumbent upon the officers, to be cool, taking care to see the instructions of the seafaring men, with regard to the position of the boats, [are] most punctually obeyed. Should there be rain, or any considerable swell of the sea, so as to occasion much spray to fly across the boats, great attention will be paid, by the men, to their musquets, to prevent any moisture from reaching the pans, or getting into the barrels... In landing, particular care must be taken, to prevent all hurry and confusion among the soldiers, whose first attention should be directed to the preservation of their firelocks and ammunition. When there is much surf, and a considerable swell of the sea, it would not be amiss to attach the pouches to the heel or bend of the bayonets; by which means, the cartridges, &c. might be raised amove the reach of any water, and easily put on again, the instant the men landed... The instant the troops first advanced are landed, they will form in order, as well as circumstances will admit; and either briskly march forward against the enemy, or wait in silence and composure until the whole be landed. Should the enemy appear, and the invading troops be so situated, as to render immediate firing necessary, the

officer must be careful to prevent the succeeding companies from injuring those who are advanced before them, by indiscriminate firing. A great deal will depend upon the cool conduct of the officers and serjeants in these trying situations. The soldiers are to be absolutely forbid, and when near the shore repeatedly warned, not to fire out of the boats, or jump disorderly into the water. When whole battalions land, they should be marched forward upon the most advantageous ground, ready to support the advanced parties, or to charge whatever presents.[62]

The landing in Egypt in 1801 was planned by Sir Ralph Abercromby and rehearsed meticulously. The first wave consisted of 58 flat-bottomed boats each containing about 50 men, with intervals of some 50ft (15.2m) between boats; companies were deployed into the boats in the order in which they would land, with the grenadier company of each battalion on the right, its position marked by a camp colour, so that the other companies could fall in on its left as they landed. A second line consisted of 84 cutters also carrying troops, which could pass through the intervals in the flat-boats. The third wave of 37 launches, with a further 14 in their rear, included the artillery pieces. The right flank was protected by the 8-gun cutter *Cruelle* and the 6-gun gunboats *Dangéreuse* and *Janizary*; the left by the cutter *Entreprenante*, the 10-gun schooner *Malta* and the 6-gun gunboat *Negresse*, plus an armed launch on each flank. Covering fire was also provided by the bomb-vessels *Fury* and *Tartarus*, and three sloops moored so as to direct their broadsides against the beach.



Amphibious operations: landing troops upon an enemy-held shore demanded a large number of boats and crews, effective fire support from the fleet, and meticulous planning. (Print after J.A. Atkinson)

The castle at Badajoz under assault by escalade, i.e. using scaling ladders. Ladders were necessary not only for climbing the walls, but to enable men to climb down into, and then out of, the ditch in front of a breached wall.

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PLATE COMMENTARIES

A: INFANTRY BATTALION IN COLUMN AT 'QUARTER DISTANCE'

One of the preferred formations for manoeuvre, the 'quarter distance' column had the companies arrayed one behind another, in lines two deep, with a gap of about 5 yards between the rear rank of one company and the rear rank of the next; the frontage was thus about 20 yards and the depth about 50 yards. The grenadier company (**G**) usually led the battalion; the light company (**L**) was at the rear; the colour-party (**CP**) was usually between the fifth and sixth companies from the front. Dundas stated that 'The field officers and adjutant of the battalion are at all times mounted – In order the more readily to give ground in movements, speedily to correct mistakes, to circulate orders, to dress pivots... and especially to take care when a column halts, that they are most speedily adjusted before wheeling up into line. These operations no dismounted officer can effectually perform, nor in that situation can he see the faults, or give the aids which his duty requires'. The commanding officer (**CO**) rode at the right front of the column, the second-in-command (**2ic**) behind him, and the adjutant (**A**) at the rear. Each company commander (**CC**) – only one is identified here – marched at the centre front of his company.

(**Inset**) At the rear of a marching company, a subaltern officer, a drummer and a sergeant in the third (or supernumerary) rank. Depending on the available numbers of personnel, this rank might have one or two officers (if two, then one near each end), and one or two drummers (if two, then marching together between a sergeant and an officer).

B: BATTALION FORMATIONS

This illustrates the amount of ground normally occupied by various formations. In the foreground, seen from the front, a battalion is drawn up in a two-deep line, nine companies strong, the frontage of each company about 20 yards, with only a minimal gap between companies. The colour-party (**CP**) is placed between Nos.4 & 5 companies; mounted officers are the commanding officer (**CO**) and his second-in-command (**2ic**) in front of the colour-party, with the major (**M**) and adjutant (**A**) at the rear behind each half ('wing') of the battalion. The drummers (**D**) are divided into three or four parties, spaced along behind the line.

The battalion's tenth company, of light infantry (**L**), is thrown forward in skirmish order; the men are operating in pairs, with a gap of about two paces between each file and about one pace between the ranks.

In the **background**, two more battalions advance in columns at half-distance and quarter-distance respectively, each with a frontage of about 20 yards, and depths of 100 yards and 50 yards respectively.

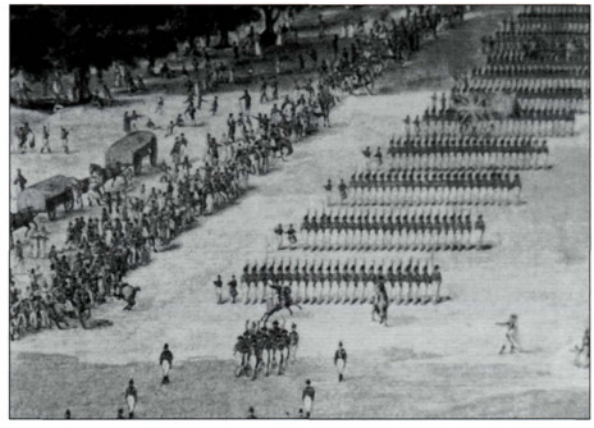
(**Inset**) One aspect of 'command and control': a colour-party of ensigns (carrying the colours) and sergeants. Williamson's manual states that the two eldest ensigns should bear the colours – King's Colour on the right and Regimental Colour on the left – but this does not seem to have been universal practice. The colours provided a rallying-point in action and could be used to direct a unit's route of advance. Although providing the escort was an honour for sergeants it was evidently not a popular one, as the flags would inevitably attract enemy fire. William Lawrence of the 40th recalled of Waterloo: 'I was ordered to the colours ... a job I did not at all like... There had been before me that day fourteen sergeants already killed and wounded while in charge of those colours, with officers in proportion, and the staff and colours were almost cut to pieces'.[63] In addition to the sergeants with their 'halberds', the two files on either side of the colour-party might be ordered to hold their fire, so as always to be ready to protect the colours.

C: THE 'REVERSE SLOPE' TACTIC – Stage 1

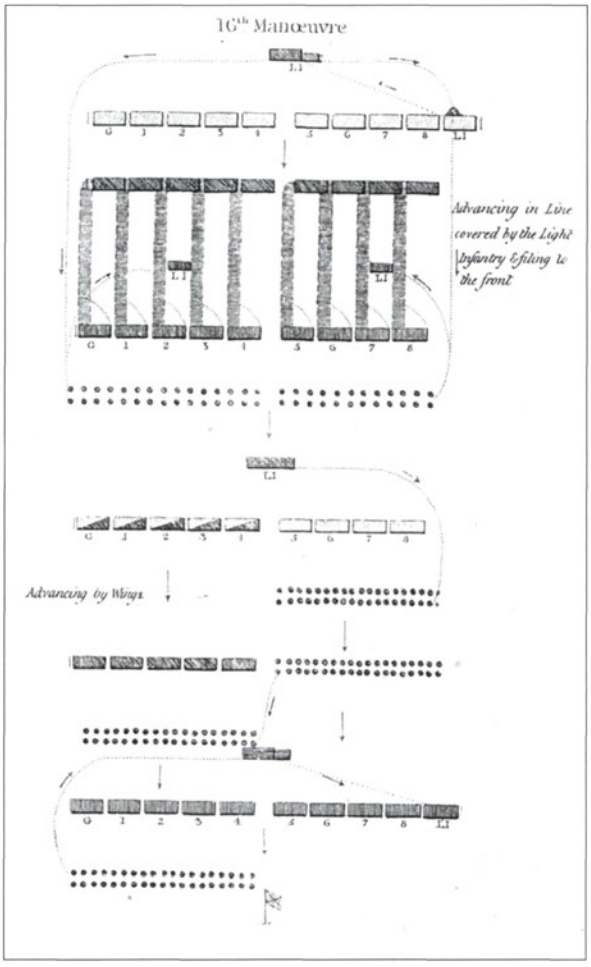
Plates C to E illustrate the theoretical sequence of an attack by a French battalion, in column, against high ground held by a British battalion. The French battalion of six companies advances in column of two-company divisions (**1D**) & (**2D**), with a frontage of approximately 45 yards, each company in three ranks, with the drummers (**Dr**) grouped between the divisions. The third line consists of the grenadier company only (**G**), since the sixth, voltigeur company (**V**), has been deployed forward as skirmishers. To the French, all that is visible of their enemy is the screen of British light infantry; the remainder of the British battalion is in line on the reverse slope concealed by the crest, and deployed as in Plate B. British field officers (**FO**) observe the French advance from the crest; as the enemy approach, the British line begins to advance towards the crest, as the skirmishing light company (**L**) divides into two halves to fall back upon each flank of the line.

(**Inset 1**) The right flank of an advancing company, the officer in the front rank and his sergeant covering him in the second rank.

(**Inset 2**) A light infantry 'command-and-control' group of a company commander, his sergeant and bugler. (Note that for variety we have shown men of a different, buff-faced regiment from those with green-faced uniforms in Inset 1.) Three groups stood spaced behind the rear of the skirmish-line: the commander, sergeant and bugler in the centre, and a subaltern and sergeant further out towards each flank.



Infantry marching past, from a contemporary print showing a review in 1798: the appearance of successive bodies of men in line, with their colours and escort mid-way along the column (see Plate A).



16th Manoeuvre from Dundas' manual (from top downwards): a battalion advances in line, then by files, then by alternate half-battalions, covered all the while by the light company; the battalion then re-forms in line. The final stage involved the important offensive tactic of advancing and firing volleys before a charge of limited duration, after which the battalion halted to reload while the light company continued to pursue the enemy, before returning to the left flank. This latter was the tactic used to good effect during the Peninsular War (see Plates D & E).

D: THE 'REVERSE SLOPE' TACTIC – Stage 2

(Continued from Plate C.) The British line advances to the crest – or to a point just below it, if the French reach it first – and delivers one or more volleys of musketry. The French, unaware of the exact position of their enemy until that moment, only attempt to deploy into line on the appearance of the British, too late to complete the manoeuvre and form an effective firing line to maximize their firepower; they are shot down as they attempt to change formation, the voltigeurs being driven back into the ruin of the first division. The companies on each flank of the British line begin to incline inwards, bringing enfilade fire to bear on the flanks of the French companies that they overlap. The British light company (**L**) has re-formed in two bodies, one behind each flank, ready to run forward again as required.

(**Inset 1**) Infantrymen delivering fire, simultaneously by rank.

(**Inset 2**) The front rank at 'Present', while the rear rank 'Make Ready'.

E: THE 'REVERSE SLOPE' TACTIC – Stage 3

(Continued from Plate D.) With the head of the French formation mauled by British musketry, the British line charges; the French break and retreat, the forward companies carrying away the troops in the rear – the French grenadier company never had a chance to get into action. The charge carries only for a short distance; then the British rally, retire, and re-form on or behind the crest to await any renewed attack. The British light company (**L**), having re-formed behind either flank, will move forward as the charge halts, to redeploy as a screen of skirmishers; they will continue to harass the retreating French and to cover the withdrawal of the British line. (This action has been somewhat simplified: normally it might involve more than one battalion on each side.)

(**Inset 1**) Troops of a Highland battalion executing the charge; the pose was described as 'charge bayonets' in the drill – the musket horizontal, 'the right wrist a little below the hip'. Stress was laid on keeping a disciplined formation even in the charge, but human nature meant that some men inevitably outran their comrades.

(**Inset 2**) Skirmishers looting French casualties. In the Peninsula the regimental light companies were most valuably supplemented by rifle companies deployed at brigade level, notably from the 60th (Royal American) Regt – as shown here – and the Brunswick Oels Jägers. Looting the enemy was commonplace, and promising opportunities were available while skirmishing; the Royal Engineer George Landmann recalled being told by a 60th skirmisher at Vimeiro that he preferred to shoot an officer, not for tactical reasons but because there was more plunder… If they had enough time, looters would routinely cut the bullion-wire epaulettes and lace from a fallen officer's coat, as well as going through his pockets.

F: THE SQUARE

Illustrated here are two varieties of hollow square; we have placed them in the usual 'checker' relationship, adopted so that each face of any adjacent squares had a clear field of fire. In the **foreground** is one with fairly uniform sides, with opposite faces of two and three companies each, about 25 to 30 yards long (depending upon the strength of the battalion). At the right of the front face – conventionally occupied by No.4 Company – the rear two ranks are firing by platoon. In the **background** is an 'oblong' about 60 yards by 20 yards, with the end faces of single-company frontage. As formed from column, the front and rear companies – each in two ranks – closed up on those immediately behind and in front respectively, forming 'ends' of the square four ranks deep, while the other six companies in the column wheeled to the flanks and faced outwards.

In the hollow centre of the formation thus created stood the colours, officers and drummers, and casualties might be dragged inside from the ranks. For example, Rees Gronow of the 1st Foot Guards described the centre of his square at Waterloo as a 'perfect hospital', in which it was impossible to take a stride without encountering dead and wounded.

(**Inset 1**) Beside a mounted field officer, whose high viewpoint allows him to supervise the integrity of the faces of

LEFT **Preparation for a charge – fixing bayonets, from a sequence illustrating the 'manual exercise' by the Oxford Loyal Volunteers. 'At the word "Bayonet" the Firelock is pushed a little forward, the left hand draws & nimbly fixes the Bayonet.' (Print after Thomas Rowlandson)**
RIGHT **A light infantryman in 1791; his pose, so different from the usual contemporary depictions of soldiers performing the 'manual exercise', exemplifies the more liberated nature of light infantry service. (Print by H.D. Soiron after H. Bunbury)**

a square under fire, drummers remove a casualty from the ranks. He will get little treatment, if any, until the battle is over; the regimental surgeons normally set up a dressing post well behind the fighting line, with the unit's baggage and the other rear-echelon personnel.

(**Inset 2**) Cross-section across the face of a square, with the two front ranks kneeling and the rear standing; note that they are closely packed, each soldier slightly to one side of the man in front of him.

G: A DIVISIONAL DEPLOYMENT – WATERLOO, 18 JUNE 1815

This plate depicts the deployment of the 3rd Division at Waterloo, as described by Capt James Shaw (later Gen Sir James Shaw Kennedy), who as Assistant Quartermaster-General arranged for the deployment, along the ridge west of the main Brussels-Charleroi highway. The division was arrayed in two lines, with a battalion of the 1st Nassau Regt from Kruse's Nassau contingent being added – at Shaw's request and with Kruse's consent – to help form the second.

Some squares would later be formed from two weak battalions (including the 2/30th and 2/73rd in one, the 33rd and 2/69th in another). To quicken the process of forming square, Shaw arranged that oblongs should be formed upon the two centre companies: 'The fronts of the oblongs were formed by four companies; the rear faces … of the same strength; and the sides of one company each, which were formed by the outward wheel of subdivisions. It will be observed that, when a battalion forms oblong in this manner upon the two centre companies, the formation is made in *less* than half the time in which it would form square on a flank company; and the same applies to the deployment.'[64]

The first line comprised five oblongs, the second four, 'so placed to be as nearly as possible in exchequer' [sic], so as to be mutually supportive with clear lines of fire. The division's remaining battalion, the 2nd Light Bn of the King's German Legion, occupied the farm of La Haye Sainte further south, supported by riflemen of the l/95th from the 5th Division in the sandpit to the north-east of the farm. The 3rd Division's skirmishers were thrown out in front of the position, with the artillery batteries of Capts Cleves (KGL) and Lloyd (RA) in front of the east–west Ohain road. An officer of Lloyd's stated that the horses and ammunition wagons were in the rear of the gun-line, between them and the infantry.

ABOVE **Fuentes de Onoro, May 1811: a square repelling French light cavalry by file-firing; note that all ranks are standing, as if the square has halted to fire while on the move – it was not simply a static formation. At Fuentes de Onoro the Light Division retreated for 2 miles across an open plain, halting periodicaly to beat off French cavalry; at El Bodon that September the 5th and 77th Regts formed a square and marched for no less than 6 miles under intermittent attacks. (See Plate F.)**

BELOW **Riflemen skirmishing (see Plate H). In the left foreground, one man fires, three are loaded and ready to fire, and another is ramming down his cartridge; it was standard practice to always have some men ready to shoot, rather than risking all of them being unloaded simultaneously. (Lithograph after Madeley, supposedly depicting Vimeiro)**

Shaw recalled that the battalions remained in their 'proper order of battle', merely lying down when under artillery fire (as was the usual practice). The appearance of the division exemplifies the fact that a line of battle was not a continuous line of troops, but often had considerable gaps between the component units.

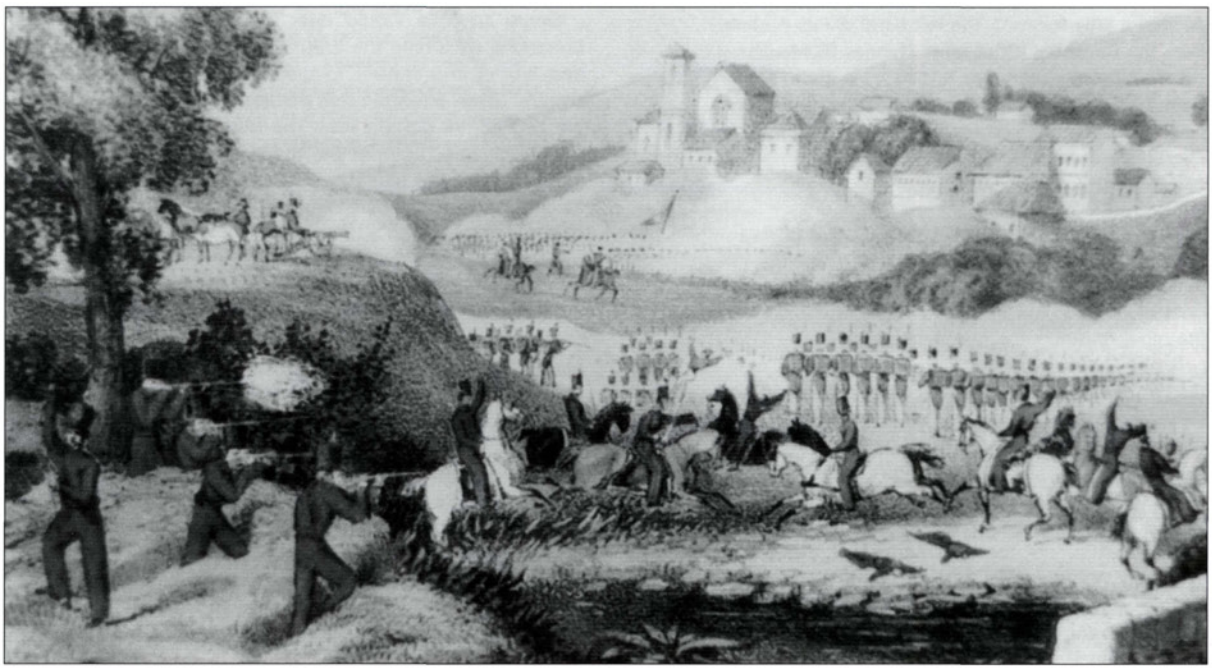
Halkett's Brigade:
(**1**) 2/69th (**2**) 33rd (**3**) 2/30th (**4**) 2/73rd
(**5**) 1st Nassau Regt
Kielmansegge's Brigade:
(**6**) Bremen Bn (**7**) Verden Bn (**8**) Grubenhagen Bn
(**9**) York Bn (**10**) Lüneburg Bn
Ompteda's Brigade:
(**11**) 5th Line Bn KGL (**12**) 8th Line Bn KGL
(**13**) 1st Light Bn KGL

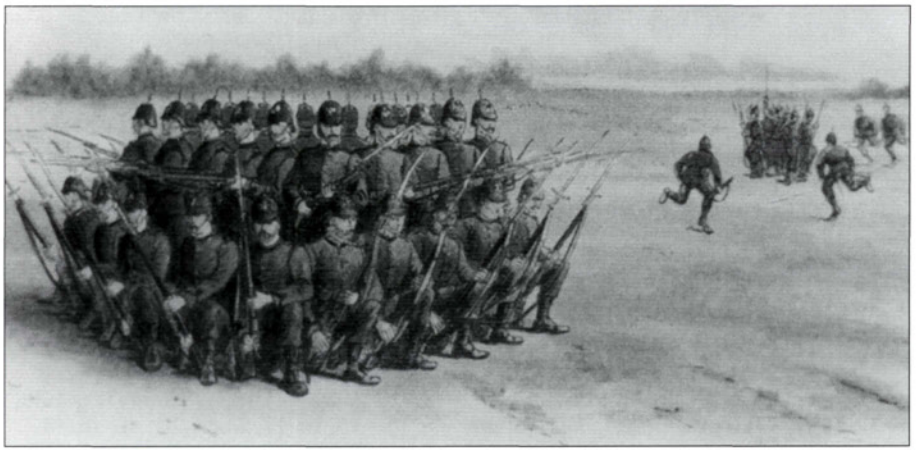
(**14**) Lloyd's Battery RA
(**15**) Cleves' Battery KGL
(**16**) Divisional skirmishers; note two light infantry companies in reserve behind the line (**R**).
(**17**) La Haye Sainte farm, and barricade across highway, held by 2nd Light Bn KGL
(**18**) Sandpit, held by 1/95th

(**Inset**) This depicts 'file-firing', by which each two-man file would be at different stages of the loading and firing process: e.g., removing the cartridge from the pouch, ramming down the cartridge, cocking the musket, and firing. It was intended to produce a steady fire rolling along the ranks, but after a few shots the cadence inevitably degenerated into something resembling 'fire at will'.

H: LIGHT INFANTRY TACTICS

This imaginary scene depicts formations used by light infantry, involving five companies advancing upon French light infantry in a defensive position.





Even in the late Victorian period, three generations after Waterloo, the formation of an *ad hoc* 'rallying square' by skirmishers surprised in the open by cavalry was still taught as an effective tactic. These small, solid clumps of men, facing in all directions, could often survive attack as long as they kept their nerve and discipline. (Print after Richard Simkin)

(**1**) One company is in extended order, in which each pair of skirmishers were supposed to be at least two paces apart, the front-rank men only firing when their rear-rank man was loaded and ready to fire. Officers were placed behind the skirmish-line.

They are supported by a company waiting in open order (**2**), the files about 2ft apart, standing at the 'trail', with their officers in front.

A third company advances in three bodies: the leading group (**3a**) in open order; a support in close order (**3b**) about 50 yards to the rear; and a reserve (**3c**) about 60 yards further back still.

The maintenance of a strong reserve to reinforce the skirmish-line, or cover its retreat, was paramount; thus the presence of another company at the rear (**4**), in close order, with officers at each end of the front rank and at the rear.

The rifle company (**5a**) is in 'chain order', with groups of four men supposedly at intervals of about ten paces apart, the officers and sergeants behind. One man from each group advanced to fire while the other three were in various stages of the loading process (**see inset**). Again, part of the company is held back in reserve (**5b**).

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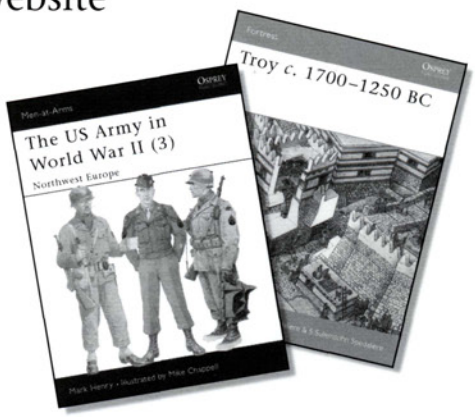

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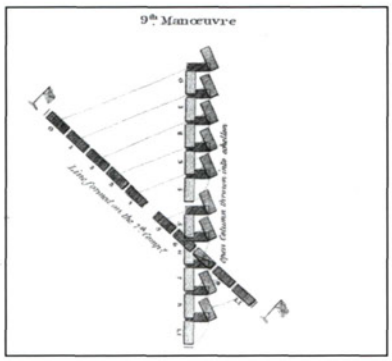

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